





2-53/88

"For a gift is not a gift alone,
A thousand sanctities invest it"

Nattie L. Draper.

from her sincere friend
Hannah Bunker

Christmas 1898

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

HER LADYSHIP

BY

ROBERT McDONALD



NEW YORK

FRANK A. MUNSEY

1897

COPYRIGHT, 1894
BY
FRANK A. MUNSEY

The retail price of this book is twenty five cents. This is the price at which it should be bought from book-sellers; the price at which it can be bought direct from the publisher.

FRANK A. MUNSEY.



HER LADYSHIP.

I.

THE road which wound along the edge of Lake Michigan was like a band of silver by the side of the vivid blue of the inland sea, sparkling under the October sunshine.

Walking along its edge were just the two figures that a clever landscape painter would have wanted there. Their backs were turned to the sun, which made a halo around the girl's golden brown hair and glorified the edges of her large brown hat. Hair and hat just matched her brown eyes, which always had golden flecks in them, sunshine or not. Her white serge dress was too light for the crisp, cold day, and she had put around her shoulders a sealskin cape which huddled her neck, and threw out all the brilliant beauty of her sparkling face. She was a typical Yankee maiden, frank and free, full of the joy of life.

The young man with her was perhaps ten years older, but they were years you were glad he had had, for every one seemed to have printed

upon his face a new intelligence. He was slender, not with the slenderness of the stripling, but with the slimness of the working man who has cast aside all that is superfluous in his body. At thirty he was fairly started on the great race of life, and he would have impressed even the most casual observer, at the moment, as having left his place in the pushing throng to try to persuade this charming girl to go with him. And she was full of the knowledge of his errand, and, like every real woman before her, was determined to make the task as difficult as possible. It is only when she means to capitulate in the end that a woman takes that trouble.

"Of course mamma was entirely happy at the success of the ball," she was saying.

"And you?"

"Oh, of course I was, I have an orderly soul; I like everything to go off well, and mamma——"

"Always mamma's social aspirations! How about your own? Are you going to be a society butterfly?"

"Out of the chrysalis of a Lodge City environment?" she asked quickly. "I suppose you think that I am like that girl in Bret Harte's poem, who went from Poverty Flat."

"And longed to get back to it. I am afraid, Alice——" his voice lingered on her name. The edges of her ears burned at the obviousness of

what was coming, and she rushed in to push it aside.

"If you are going to say that you are afraid I haven't any such gay memories as dancing 'down the middle with the man that shot Sandy McGee,' you are right. Lodge City, or what we saw of it, was not gay. Mamma kept us beautifully and exclusively apart from all that sort of thing. We never knew anybody there but you."

"I confess to being far from gay at times, but I did my best. Gaiety never was my strong point, exactly."

"It is mine. I love to be gay. I love to have a grand new house, and lots of parties, and tee-to-tum—for a while."

For an instant Batterman hesitated, and thought himself a selfish brute. He was going to ask her to give up the parties and the tee-to-tumming, and go away with him. He believed that she would do it. He was a clever man, shrewd at reading faces, and he would have been a stick or a stone if he had not seen how this girl's countenance changed and glowed at his approach. But he loved her with a tenderness which had grown with the years. He had first known her as a little girl living on the hill above the dump of the Gray Colt mine, while her father was taking out the millions which had made him, for the moment at least, the richest man in Chicago.

Batterman was the engineer who had developed the mine and had made its working possible. He had lived near by, and had been almost a member of the Sanderson family in those early years. When the ore got richer and richer, Mrs. Sanderson took the two children—her own daughter and her husband's daughter—to Europe and left them there. She was too wise and clever a woman to stay abroad herself, and lose touch with Mr. Sanderson's daily and hourly life.

The idea of a European education has a little different appearance to those who have gone through it and to those to whom it is a mere fancy. The life of young girls living with a governess is much the same in whatever part of the world they happen to be. It cannot fail to be quieter and a little more narrowing in a Swiss village than in a Western town. Alice Sanderson had learned to speak French and German, and to restrain much of the exuberance that her step-mother still allowed her ; but gaiety she had never known in her life until now. She spoke truly in saying that she loved it, but there was something she loved a great deal more, and that was the presence of her father's engineer, Christopher Batterman. The happiness of having him near her made her fairly vibrate with the joy of life, but Batterman, being modest, put much of it down to her delight in her new environment.

"I wonder if, when I go back, you would sit up after a ball to write me a letter, as that girl in the poem did, and tell me about your proposals on the stairs, and—and all the rest of it."

She was new enough to Bret Harte's poetry to remember that "all the rest of it" was the assurance that her heart was out there, and that he had struck it. She wasn't going to tell him quite that—yet. She found this playing about the subject delightful. She had always loved Chris, she thought, and she was going to tell him so—after a time.

She sighed with content as she thought of it. It was so sweet and natural that she should be in love with Chris—be going to marry him, some day; Chris, who had always been her hero, who was bigger and braver and cleverer than anybody else. He was the one ideal she had ever had. She stole a glance at him sidewise, and thought that no man could look the modern girl's hero more completely. There was nothing of the carpet knight about Batterman.

"Oh, Connie does the letter writing, doesn't she?"

"And a jolly little correspondent she is. She tells me everything, with comments. I advise your father to buy a society paper for Connie when she gets a little older. She can fill it with entertaining material."

“I am afraid she will fill a great many that belong to other people. She is a restless soul.” But she spoke a little coolly. Connie was only fifteen, but at fifteen, she remembered, she herself had been in love with Batterman. She was sorry she had mentioned her sister’s name. Another girl’s name had no place just now, and in a way it had broken the spell which the day had cast around them. The subject was being changed, and she did not intend that. She was fairly holding back the great flood of things she meant to say when that little barrier that still lay between them had been crossed. The door had been half open so many times, and she had snapped it shut in her lover’s face; but for all that she wanted him to take it by assault. She wanted him to push his way through. He must know that she, the real, honest, loving Alice Sanderson, was waiting for him on the other side. And meanwhile Batterman, conscious that after all he was a selfish man who wanted to take this girl’s life for his own, hesitated on the other side, his soul filled with reverence for the pure white sanctuary of a young girl’s heart. He felt that out of her very innocence and sweetness she might take him in too soon, before she had seen enough of the world she loved and enjoyed so much.

But when youth and beauty and love come to-

gether, prudence and philosophy are pushed to the wall. Love is an arrogant god, who believes that he alone should rule ; and when he is the real thing, and not one of those chubby imitations which belong to fans and tapestry, and to the illustrations of society verse, he generally has his way. He was beginning to assert himself now, when a commotion a little way ahead attracted the two young people's attention.

A horse ran out through the iron gateway of one of the handsomest places, and began plunging sidewise, standing on his hind legs until it reared almost backward. A groom followed and tried to get at its head, but the rider, who held a short cane in his hand, called out to the man angrily, and he drew back. Evidently the horseman wanted to conquer his own steed.

"That's that wild horse of Judge Nelson's," Batterman said. "What idiot is trying to ride it in afternoon dress with a cane in his hand? He ought to have a whip and a pair of spurs, and be on the prairie."

"It's Lord Lurgan!" Miss Sanderson said excitedly. "It's Lord Lurgan!" I heard him tell Judge Nelson that he could ride anything, when he was talking about the horse. They say he is a great sportsman."

"So he may be, but he ought to have better

sense than to try to ride like that. Come in here. He can't manage the brute."

Batterman hurried her across the road and into the nearest gateway. The horse was plainly bolting, but its rider, a rather heavily built, florid faced young man, had a set expression under his tall hat which made it seem likely that he would bring his steed to terms sooner or later, and without leaving its back, either.

"By Jove, he can stick on, eh?" Batterman exclaimed in admiration. He thought the man foolhardy, too ready to "show off," but he was ready to give him his due. The drive seemed to be almost deserted just here at this hour, and he was going to tire the vicious brute out. Batterman, accustomed to seeing men deal with the wildest horses in the world, thought of the expression, "two of a kind." The Englishman and the horse seemed to have pretty much the same disposition.

Batterman had sought shelter for Alice in the gates of a fine open garden, next to a place called "The Cedars," whose driveway wound about in an eccentric fashion and was dark with the branches of the heavy, close trees. The house belonged to some old ladies who had lived here long before Chicago became the great city it is, and who clung to many of their old fashioned ways. One of these was to allow the needles of

the trees to carpet their driveway, making it noiseless. There was no gate, but two old stone posts which guarded the way. As if unconscious of the commotion going on outside, a victoria swung out into the road just as Lord Lurgan dashed along on the infuriated horse. In another second there would have been a collision, but the rider gave a mighty tug to the bridle, and changed the direction in which his steed was going, with safety to the lady in the low victoria but disaster to himself, for the horse did not stop. There were hoarse shouts from the men, a cry from the lady in the carriage, and Alice, sickened, put her hands over her eyes, while Batterman made a dash for the wall, whose sheer side dropped down to the lake. The horse and rider had disappeared.

Men seemed to gather like flies from everywhere, all of them either climbing the wall or standing on it. Alice started toward it, when she heard a voice calling her, and turned to see her stepmother, with a white face, still sitting in the victoria. The footman had followed the rest of the men.

“Did you see it? What will your father say? Oh, that brave man! He fell over the wall to keep from running into me. I thought it was death. That great black brute’s eyes were like red coals. He looked like a demon!” She had

her handkerchief to her mouth, and her eyes were stained, but her hand was not trembling. "If he is killed I can never forgive myself for coming out today. I shall feel like a murderess. I wonder if he is killed!"

A shout answered her. There was a little rise here, and the wall, not very high anywhere, was much lower a few rods down. The footman came back and touched his hat.

"He's only a bit shook up, ma'am. There was a bit of sand below, and they ain't wet to speak of."

In a few minutes Batterman came back supporting the rider, his hat not so fresh as it had been, but still on his head. He was limping painfully, with a sprained knee. Mrs. Sanderson's victoria was drawn up beside him.

"You must come home with me, Lord Lurgan," she said quickly, for Judge Nelson, large and pompous, was coming down the road. "Mr. Sanderson must thank you himself for what you have done for——" She put her handkerchief to her lips again.

"I suspect Judge Nelson——"

"I think we have the first claim to give you the attention you could not have at your hotel."

Lurgan smiled a little uneasily, and then he looked at the grave, respectful face of Alice Sanderson, who stood by the victoria's side.

"But I should be taking Miss Sanderson's place in the carriage."

"Oh, no, I was walking," she said promptly.

Judge Nelson came up, loud with self reproaches, but Lurgan was installed against the high backed seat of the carriage by this time, and in a few minutes was being whirled toward the new Sanderson palace. Batterman watched them drive away with some of the amusement with which he had always regarded Mrs. Sanderson and her "luck," and turned to find Alice with a serious face.

"That was a brave thing to do," she said.

"He saved mamma's life."

"By almost riding an unbroken horse over her?"

"That isn't like you. You are generally more generous."

"Am I ungenerous? I would not be that. The man seems to be courageous enough, but a trifle foolhardy. Probably he did not know the real character of the brute he attempted to ride. Nelson was responsible for that. The horse should never be put on a public road like this." The thread of their old talk was gone. "How long have you known Lord Lurgan?"

"A month. He brought some letters of introduction to papa. We all like him very much. He is rather like a big boy in some ways. His

people are very great, they say, but he never mentions that." Batterman smiled again at the girlish idea that such reticence was remarkable. "He is so solid and fresh looking, and he has done all sorts of things—shot elephants and tigers and grizzly bears."

"The grizzly bears should not affect a girl from Lodge City."

"It *sounds* great, doesn't it?"

She laughed up in his face with the sense of humor that was one of her greatest charms to Batterman. He was on the point of telling her so, but they were almost at the house, and the atmosphere was wanting. It seemed to him that Alice hastened her steps, and he had a vague, undefined jealousy of the man who was then in her home, and who would probably stay for weeks. He would have thought it insulting to doubt Alice. He felt absolutely sure of her love for him—a love he so much respected that he wished her to have all that girlhood could give her before she realized the full force of it, and the dominating factor that it would be in her life when it was once confessed. But he did not want another man to live in the same house with her, and learn to know her sweet ways as he knew them, and perhaps to care for her. He pretended to himself that there had been no meaning in the look he had caught in Lurgan's eye as it

rested upon Alice before he accepted Mrs. Sanderson's invitation.

They went up the driveway and through the great front door into the hall, which had been copied after that of some renaissance palace, and contained a number of treasures culled from ruined homes abroad. As they proceeded across it, a clatter of girl and dog was heard coming down the broad staircase and almost into Batterman's arms.

"Oh, Mr. Christopher!" she cried. "We've got the live lord in the house! Alice, mamma wants to speak to you;" and then as her sister stepped away, the child put her hand through Batterman's arm with the affectionate familiarity of fifteen. "Do you know, Chris," she said confidentially, "I think I'm going to belong to the nobility?"

"Why, have you designs on Lurgan?" He lifted his eyebrows and laughed. Connie always amused him.

"Not I! But I am sure he's going to marry Alice."

"Really?" still laughing.

"Oh, I can tell the signs. He's fairly kow-towing to mamma, and she is kow-towing back. Oh, Chris, just *think* what it would be to have a countess for a sister! I always knew that I was meant for better things. Find out if she really

is going to marry him, Chris, won't you, and give me a quiet tip? If she is, won't I just *sit* on some of these Chicagoese! Promise me you will use every effort to find out her state of mind!"

"I think I can promise that," Batterman said gravely.

II.

MRS. SANDERSON was trembling so that her hands could hardly unclasp the elegant little sable collar which she wore tightly about her throat. Her lips were set in a determined line, and the color on her cheek was high.

Her husband had turned around in the wheel chair before his desk and thrown his cigar in the fire, which was always a mark of extreme irritation with him. It was hard to realize that Mr. Sanderson had ever been anything but the man of position he now was. There was no suggestion of plebeian origin in his face, too delicate a face, his wife sometimes thought, when she had seen brute force conquer him even in some of his most delicately matured plans. He was a handsome man, tall, dignified, and modish. His gray hair was cut at just the proper length, and carefully parted in the middle and brushed back. His gray mustache was trimmed sharply across his fine mouth. No one would have guessed that these points were as much due to the care of his wife as the ring on his finger and the pearl in his scarf, or her own careful toilet. She

dressed him to fit the part she intended he should play, and, quite unconsciously to him, she taught him most of his lines.

Unfortunately, as the years went by, Mrs. Sanderson had taken on something of the air of a general in command. She had grown a little arrogant. The delicate finesse by which she had been wont to manage her husband in earlier days had been put aside more and more, as he came to depend more and more upon her judgment. She had almost forgotten how to steer away from the danger point of irritation. But as she took time to unfasten her collar, she mentally reviewed the situation, and calmed her outward agitation, although her heart was fairly boiling. She wanted to cry out, to protest ; to tell her husband not only that he should not oppose her, but that at this time he must be a wall of support to her. In her soul she almost despised him that he was not one of those heavy, hard natures which can deal bludgeon blows, instead of the gentleman he was.

Sanderson, partly conscious of her errand, waited for the demand which he knew was coming. Instead of making it at once, she went to the window and looked out over the city. Her husband's office was in one of the tallest of the Chicago buildings, and far away up on the lake side she could see, in the brilliant sun of the

morning, the gray stone towers of her new home, which had appeared, only the other day, the pinnacle of her ambition. Her great "house warming" ball had seemed to open every door to her. She had thought herself perfectly happy; and yet, as it had always been since she was a country school teacher out in Nebraska, she found herself, like the fisherman's wife, begging the Genius of Fate every morning for some new honor. There was an inner social kingdom, she discovered, of whose gates she had only caught a glimpse. She might stay out of it all her life. But Mrs. Sanderson had no intention of staying out of any place to which wit and money could effect an entrance.

It was this same wit which taught her that her husband was in no mood to be bullied, and that she must take time to change her tactics. When she turned her face again, it was earnest, but calm and sweet. She walked over and put her hand around his shoulder and sat down on the arm of his chair. Mrs. Sanderson was well under forty, and her figure was as slender as it had been ten years ago. Perhaps she looked younger and prettier in her husband's eyes for the moment, because she so seldom encouraged the girlish attitude in herself. She did not consider it dignified in the mother of a tall girl of fifteen and the stepmother of a beauty of twenty.

"Dick," she said caressingly, and then added rather sadly, "I am worried."

"What's wrong? Cook out of sorts? New brougham bad style?"

His relief was so great over the change in the atmosphere that he jested foolishly, and she paid no attention.

"I am worried over Alice." His eyebrows began to lower and his hand relaxed on hers, but she went on before he could speak. "She is in love with Lord Lurgan."

Mrs. Sanderson grew cold about the heart as she said the words. They had come on the inspiration of the moment, and while she shivered at her own temerity, she exulted at the audacity of the lie.

Sanderson pushed her away from him, and stood up before her.

"What are you saying, Julia? You are crazy. You have been worrying yourself to death for two months because you said that you were sure Alice had some sort of an understanding with Chris Batterman."

She stood up, too, and looked at him with an expression he could never resist. Richard Sanderson had thought himself in love with his first wife when he married her; they had been boy and girl together, and had been engaged when they were sixteen, living on adjoining

farms. She had died before he was old enough, or had lived by her side long enough, to realize anything of the depth and strength of the nature which she had possessed, and which she had bequeathed to her infant daughter. He had never learned it in his daughter. The second wife was the dominating passion of his life. She obscured his vision. He was a just man, a good man, a kind man, but more and more, as years went by, he allowed his impulses to be strained through her reason. Now, as he looked at her, he found himself thinking that his wife was clever and frank, and that he was unjust and vulgar to think that her first care was not for his daughter's happiness. Women understood women, according to Mr. Sanderson's creed—a mistaken one which most men share.

“ But that was before she saw Lurgan. Today —” she hesitated—“ today she saw him save my life at the peril of his own, at the risk of almost certain death.”

Sanderson's face had grown white, and he took her almost roughly by the shoulder.

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ He was trying that dreadful horse of Judge Nelson's, the one that killed his groom, and I came into the way in my victoria when it was running away. He pulled it over the lake wall to save me, and only escaped death by a miracle.

I took him home with me, and I shall keep him there. Alice saw it all, and in an instant I knew what was in her mind. Young Batterman was never the man for her. After all, he is of no family, no position, no anything, but Alice has flirted with him innocently. She does not know what to do. She thinks you want her to marry him, and that you have a contempt for foreign noblemen——”

“Generally I have.”

“But you know Lurgan is not just a fortune hunter. He belongs to one of the oldest and best families in the world, and they have enormous estates.”

“Which need money.”

“I tell you Alice is in love with him.”

“If she is, I suppose that settles it, but she doesn’t act much like it.”

“That is because she is afraid of you.”

“What must I do?” he inquired meekly.

“The first thing might be to send Christopher Batterman to the Sandwich Islands or some place, quite comfortably, so that Alice can have some decent pretext for breaking off with him. Girls have such soft consciences. Poor child! She would probably sacrifice her life and her happiness, and a great future”—Mrs. Sanderson had almost added, “for all of us,” but she broke off in time—“on account of some light word spoken

in a flirtation with a boy she has known all of her life."

"I'd rather see her marry Chris. He is a splendid young fellow. I have had him right under my own eye for ten years. He is as good as gold, and as clever as daylight. I wouldn't ask a better son in law, if the girls must marry."

"But I tell you she has fallen head over ears in love with Lurgan. Don't you know what it is to fall in love with anybody?" She laughed up in his face. She had the game in her own hands now, and she truly thought her husband the dearest man in the world. She kept down the subconsciousness that he was not very clever or quick.

"Yes, I do," he said.

A quarter of an hour later, when Mrs. Sanderson stepped into her brougham at the door of the building, her face was flushed and her eyes were bright with a triumph which she only dared show to strangers. The plans were hers to make. She would be a fool indeed if she could not carry the game now. Lord Lurgan's mother in law could do almost anything. She forgot all about Alice. Her stepdaughter was merely a pawn on her chessboard. She dreamed day dreams as the carriage jolted its way toward the North Side, caught here and there in blockades. She looked out on the rushing thousands of the grimy city,

but she saw only a grand house for herself in London, where she entertained the great of the earth. She saw her own daughter, Constance, being presented at court by her sister, the Countess of Lurgan. Perhaps—who knows?—she might herself be the grandmother of a prince. She hid away in the corner of her brain the knowledge that Sanderson had heart disease. It was a painful thought ; he was so dear, so good, he let her have her own way entirely, but if—there was a black space beyond that “if,” and on the other side of it, a vision of herself, Julia Sanderson, who used to teach Nebraska farmers’ children to read, wearing a coronet. Stranger things had happened.

III.

THE next morning, when Batterman went to the office, he found Mr. Sanderson rather nervously walking the floor. As his lieutenant came in, the mine owner looked at him with something like an appeal in his deep set brown eyes. Batterman loved Mr. Sanderson as he would have loved his father if he had lived ; and it is probable that he saw the older man's faults more leniently than he would have looked upon those of a parent. There are no sins that we so entirely condemn, of which we are so impatient, as those we ourselves possess, and a parent's foibles are likely to take on the air of direct and personal insults.

Batterman was clever enough to see that Mrs. Sanderson's dominion over her husband was but the result of a tenderness of nature which had been used to her own advantage by a very clever and very selfish woman, who still kept his love by appearing to be always gentle and thoughtful. It is only your honest woman who can afford to quarrel and to get into irritating rages.

Time had taught Batterman to expect some-

thing in the way of a change at any moment. Mrs. Sanderson had been making plans, and her husband was hesitating about carrying them out. The young man hung up his coat and hat, and came back to his desk and sat down. He found the whole top of it covered with papers and maps. They appeared to be the prospectus of a mining company in New Mexico.

“What is this, Mr. Sanderson?”

“That? Oh, yes, Chris. I wanted to ask you about that. Do you think that you could go down to New Mexico and look into that property—see if it is worth what they say it is?”

“I know the history of this property, sir. It belongs to the Olla Smelter people. It was sold to them by sharp practice. The owner made them think that two other parties wanted it, and traveled about the country on false telegrams, until the Olla people thought that if it was so much in demand it ought to be theirs. Oh, yes, I know the concern. Why should you waste time on it? You have no other properties down there. The Olla people would have to smelt the ore.”

“I—ah—thought of enlarging my field.”

“And you want me to take my time away from the matters that brought me to Chicago to look into this hole in the ground?”

“I should like you to report upon this mine.”

"My report is made. I know its history, and seriously advise against it. It certainly would not be profitable to you if the Olla people give it up."

Mr. Sanderson hesitated for a moment, and then he said :

"I am not in the habit of neglecting your advice, Batterman, but I have a reason for sending you to look at the mine. I wish you to go."

Batterman stood up and looked the older man fairly in the eyes. They were honest, good eyes, and the two men loved each other.

"When, sir?"

"Today."

There was silence for a moment, and then Batterman drew a long breath.

"Mr. Sanderson," he said steadily, "I will be perfectly frank with you, and I ask the same treatment from you. We have been together too long for one to finesse with the other. I only know the direct path, and I am accustomed to the direct word from you. I cannot think that this mine's future is the cause of my being asked to leave Chicago just now."

"I think I have the right to ask you to go where I choose, at any time. Those have been the relations that have long existed between us hitherto."

"The business relations, yes. But I am not sure that it is a business reason that causes you to send me away. Until this moment I did not believe that words were necessary between you and me upon a certain subject, but I fear now that it was a mistake upon my part to neglect to speak them long ago. You knew—you have known, or I believed that you knew—that I love your daughter, and wish more than anything else in the world to ask her to marry me."

"Don't, Chris."

Sanderson spoke as if it hurt him.

"I must speak now, sir. I suppose some men in my position might have thought twice before they spoke of marrying the daughter of as rich a man as you are, but I know that you do me the justice to recognize that I never thought of that. I am able to give the woman I marry comforts, and I have every prospect of being able to give her much more. You know me for all I am, and I believe I may say that I am not now mistaken in thinking that you have not wished to discourage me."

"No, Chris, never!" Sanderson put out his hand. "If Alice were to marry you, I should give her to you with every hope for her happiness and yours."

"Then, Mr. Sanderson, what is the matter now?"

"I hoped that you would go away without asking. My daughter's happiness must be the first consideration to me. I cannot influence her in such a matter."

"But surely, Alice——"

"I fear you have taken her too seriously. You have lived out of the world a great deal, and you may have made an ideal of womanhood, of girlhood, which is too high. They sometimes trifle."

"Not Alice," Batterman said very proudly. "Alice does not trifle."

"She may not have intended to. I may be mistaken." There was relief in his voice. "Tell me, Chris, has she ever told you that she—cared for you—in that way?"

"No, she has not. She is so young, I have hesitated to ask her."

"Has she put you off?"

"A little, sometimes, yes."

"It is very seldom that a woman loves the man she cared for in her early girlhood." Mr. Sanderson was repeating his wife's lesson now. "I am led to believe that Alice has learned to care for some one else, and is unhappy because she has encouraged you. I speak with great frankness to you, Chris, because you are both son and friend to me. But the vagaries of a girl cannot be accounted for."

There was silence in the office for a minute. The coming and going of clerks in the next room, the voices of strangers, and the heavy clang of a safe door came through the glass partition.

"Mr. Sanderson," Batterman said at last, "this means too much to me to let it go even upon your word. I mean to go to Alice and ask her for the truth. She is your daughter, and she will give it to me."

"You have my permission to go, and"—he held out his hand—"you have more than that. You have also my sincere hope that you will succeed."

"Is the other man—whom Alice is supposed to care for—Lord Lurgan?"

"Yes."

Batterman set his lips tightly together. He had seen the man on horseback, had seen him unthinking of the beast under him, seen him fight it as one brute would fight another, and he did not mean that this man should marry Alice without a protest from himself. She was his own. What a fool he had been not to speak, and hear from her own lips exactly what she felt!

Well, he would know. He put on his coat, and, without saying another word to Mr. Sanderson, called a cab and drove out to the North Side.

IV.

MRS. SANDERSON had kept in touch with her husband's daughter as closely as was possible with two natures that were antagonistic at the core. Finesse was always the older woman's weapon. She was like a solitaire player who worked out the game skilfully and fairly until the point came where not another move can be made, and then she slipped a card and pretended to herself that she hadn't seen herself do it. It seemed so foolish to lose a game on account of one card being in the wrong place.

The morning after Lurgan's installation in the house, she went into Alice's room and sat down on the side of the bed. Alice was a very late riser generally, and this morning she was lying in a day dream; all the coming days looked beautiful now. Mrs. Sanderson put her white hand caressingly on the girl's long hair, which lay out on the pillow. Alice picked it up and looked at it.

"Mamma," she said, "where are all of your pretty rings?"

"Oh, I have discovered that rings are not good

style any more. We are too rich to wear them. I am thinking of putting all of my diamonds away. They look ostentatious. There are a great many things people with as much money as we have cannot do."

"I never think about our money. I do the thing I would do, any way."

"Oh, no, you do not. People wouldn't let you. There is only one safe rule for people with great fortunes, and that is, to keep as much as possible with the people who have like fortunes—or the equivalent in position. They cannot gain anything from us. Money brings us a crowd of followers. I shall be perfectly miserable, for example, until you and Constance are married to men who I know are not fortune hunters, who can offer you as much or more than you give them. It is a great responsibility;" and Mrs. Sanderson sighed.

A fine red made the girl's face look like a rose on the white linen, and she threw the veil of her hair across her cheek.

"I guess Connie and I can relieve you of that responsibility. I mean to marry myself, when I get ready, and I believe Connie is going to do everything for herself. Your office is a sinecure;" and she patted her stepmother's hand.

"Dear," Mrs. Sanderson said impressively, "do you believe that I love you, that I have your

interest at heart just as much as Constance's? I am not your own mother, although I have always tried to take her place to you."

"You have been as indulgent as any mother could be."

"Perhaps that is rather evading the question. If I were your own mother, it would be so easy to say what I must. Perhaps you will think that your own mother would not have said it. I can only speak with my own limitations."

Mrs. Sanderson's voice had a pathetic tremble in it. It was very unlike her not to be firm. This attitude had always been reserved for use upon Sanderson himself when everything else failed, and its strangeness made Alice sit up, full of foreboding.

"Is there anything wrong with papa?"

"No, no." She hesitated and looked out of the window for a moment, collecting the best words to speak in. "You are very young, Alice, and I do not want you to spoil your life by—*to* spoil two lives, if having your beautiful young life in his keeping *could* be anything but a great boon to any man."

"What do you mean? Be plain, be frank with me. I do not understand you."

"I am speaking of Mr. Batterman." Her voice was low, and she pressed the girl's hand. "We can all see, everybody can see, that you

have a girlish fancy for him, that you have always had, and most of all he can see it—has seen it for a long time.” Alice gave a little gasp that was almost a sob, and fell back among her pillows. “You are the daughter of the man to whom he owes everything, his future as well as his past. He is a man of honor, a gentleman who lives up to the letter of his obligations in the most scrupulous fashion. You know that. If you love him, he is ready to marry you.”

“How can you say such things?” the girl wailed.

“Because, my dear, they are true. If you should accept Mr. Batterman—and he most assuredly means to ask you to marry him, for there is absolutely no other course left open to him—if you do so, both your father and I know that he will be to you what is known as a ‘good husband.’ Perhaps, as the years go by, you will be as happy or happier than the woman who is married because she is loved. After all, in most cases, marriage is a mere friendship.”

Every word dropped on the girl’s heart like molten lead, scarring, burning. But Mrs. Sanderson was pitiless.

“Your father did not wish me to speak to you. He thinks Christopher would never let you discover the difference, but I know that he cannot help it. You would discover it for yourself, and

then—there would stretch before you a long life of regret. Caring for Mr. Batterman as you do, you might be happy but for the thought, which cannot fail to come, that he married you out of honor and pity, and that you have spoiled his life.”

She still held the girl's hand, which lay limp in hers. Alice was not the saint who could clasp the hand that smote her. Her father was a sort of hero, a creature all sweetness and kindness. His wife had never allowed him to come close enough to his children for them to understand his faults, or to believe for a second that she ruled him. To them he was the wise, dignified ruler of his household. That he had seen her humiliation was the bitterest drop in Alice's misery. His indorsement made any possibility of a mistake out of the question. The idea that her mother could be lying never for one instant crossed her mind, and yet how easy it would have been to prove it ! She had only to speak to her father, and if it were untrue the whole fabric would fall to the ground. She did not know that Mrs. Sanderson was absolutely sure that there would be no confidences between father and child. She had made that out of the question by years of intermediation. They were as far removed as the peasant who kneels to a saint and his God.

"I have thought over this for weeks—for months. Once I thought it best to go to Mr. Batterman, and ask him to go away and let your girlish fancy die, so that, as time progressed, and you became older, you would laugh at your youthful folly; and then I thought you would prefer this."

"Yes, yes, a thousand times yes; I certainly should. Will you go now, mamma, and leave me alone?"

Mrs. Sanderson leaned over and kissed the girl tenderly on the cheek.

"Forgive me, my daughter," she said.

"Yes, yes, you are right. It was the only thing to do. But promise me one thing. Do not tell papa. Let him think, won't you, that I saw it for myself, that I was not so stupid and silly and blind? Promise me."

"I promise;" and a moment later, as Mrs. Sanderson closed the door behind her, and stood alone in Alice's sitting room, she smiled at that promise, a smile that was full of satisfaction as well as appreciation of what appeared to her a humorous point.

Alice lay for moments, stunned with wounded pride, and with something that went deeper than that. Of course she saw it all now. Of course Batterman was all that her father and mother thought him. It was for those qualities that

she loved him. As she thought of her broken dream, she put her face in the pillow, and almost choked with sobs that a young girl's throat should never feel. He should never, never know that she had loved him. She turned and touched the button for her maid, and with a woman's instinct asked for the prettiest house gown she owned.

"Is Lord Lurgan well enough to come down to breakfast, Celeste?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, miss. He has been up this hour. His sprain has been so bad that he can do no walking, and they have brought a chair that the men can carry for him. He is in the breakfast room with your mamma now, miss, looking as handsome as a picture. But he is not so handsome as Mr. Batterman is."

Alice winced at the woman's insinuating tone. So even the servants knew her secret, knew that she was only waiting for a man to throw his handkerchief! Probably they thought of her as the rich man's daughter who would buy a husband.

"I think Lord Lurgan much the handsomer," she said. "He has had more—oh, I suppose you people like Mr. Chris' style," she went on loftily. "Mr. Batterman is so good that everybody thinks him handsome."

She lingered over her dressing, and had the

maid bring her her coffee and roll. She ached with misery, and she was trying to hide it away somewhere out of sight. Never before had she made so careful a toilet for the morning, and she was still hesitating at the glass when Batterman's card was brought up to her.

V.

IT seemed to Alice that the name on that little bit of pasteboard was yards high. It was the most dominating thing in the room. She now felt some of Chris' magnetism in its touch. She was young enough and girlish enough, and had sufficient imagination, to remember that it had just left his pocket and his hand, and she felt as a believer in relics might when he touches something that has been the property of one of his saints. Two hours ago, with the assurance in her heart that they two loved each other, she would have been calm. Like every woman under such circumstances, she would have been quite mistress of the situation. Now it was altogether changed.

"Tell Granger to wait a moment," she said indifferently. She was surprised at her own voice, and then her thoughts ran ahead of her. Of course we were all mere machines, she reasoned, if we cared to be. All there was to do was to let your brain sit up there aloft and control your body. It could not but be a willing servant if you insisted upon it. She would show them !

She, Alice Sanderson, let a man marry her out of pity? She began to say that she disliked him for his presumption, and all the time her heart, that heart whose longings were all to be so rudely reversed, was beating heavily, sending nervous throbs into her throat. She finished a last detail or two of her toilet and opened the door to pass the man who stood there waiting with his tray. He was one of the old servants they had had in Lodge City.

“Wait here a moment, Granger,” she said, “and then go down and ask Mr. Batterman to come into the breakfast room. Mamma is there, is she not?”

“Yes, Miss Alice—but Mr. Christopher——”

“Mr. Christopher must take us where he finds us, at this hour of the morning,” she answered lightly, and walked to the staircase, which ran from the end of her hall down into the conservatory and led her on into the breakfast room. As she removed her hand from its bronze railing, she found that Constance was in one of her erratic flights.

“Oh, say, Alice,” she began, “are you going in to see Chris now? He’s here asking for you. Mother has just sent me back up stairs. I think she wants to impress Lord Lurgan with an idea of the discipline she has over me. It appears to be her fancy that she can make him believe I was

brought up in a pinafore on cold mutton, like those English schoolgirls in the novels." She gave a crowing chuckle which was yet overflowing with merriment. "I'll bet a dollar she thinks he thinks I never read a novel, unless it was 'Ivanhoe' or some dusty old thing! I love to see mother sit for her picture. But are you going in to see Chris?"

"Where is he?"

"In the library. He has something on his mind. I know from his looks."

"I sent for him to come into the breakfast room. They are all there, aren't they?"

"If you mean mother and Lurgan——"

"Lurgan! Oh, Connie! You are getting so dreadfully ill bred."

"Now that's just where you show how little you know! In all the novels they always call them by their last names. They sign letters that way. You'll be calling him Lurgan all over the place. Now you needn't look like that. I know I'm——" She set her small mouth, and instead of going up stairs, walked straight into the library, where Batterman stood looking out of the window at the lake and its boats gleaming in the morning sun.

"Say, Chris," she said, "when Alice marries Lord Lurgan, won't she call him 'Lurgan'? *Isn't* that fashionable?"

"What are you talking about?" Batterman asked, with some impatience.

"I am talking about calling an English lord by his title. I knew that years ago. Alice said it was ill bred, and she wouldn't do it, but I guess she'll find out I am right when she gets over there."

"If you please, Mr. Batterman," old Granger interrupted, "Miss Alice will see you in the breakfast room."

"I believe I'll make a sneak back with you, Chris. Mother sent me up stairs to study, but I am dying to stay. I have a thousand questions I want to ask his lordship."

"Are they all there?"

"That's what Alice asked. If you mean is our noble guest there, he is. Mother isn't feeding him, but she's doing everything short of it."

"See here, Connie, I want to see your sister for a few moments."

"She knows it, but she can't tear herself away. Come into the breakfast room. They will all be going out of there in a moment, and then you can get your chance. Come along."

The breakfast room at The Pillars, as Mrs. Sanderson had named her home, was smaller and cozier than the great banqueting hall which might have held the chief of a feudal castle and

all his retainers. Lurgan, lying at his ease in a chair, which had been purchased for his use that very morning, thought that his lines had fallen into pleasant places, and that Mrs. Sanderson was a very jolly, clever sort of woman. Up to this; he had thought rather more of her than of the pretty stepdaughter, although Alice had always been in his mind as a possible source of income. He frankly admitted to himself that he had come to America to marry a rich girl. He had been in New York, and he had decided that the mothers and fathers of most of the eligible young women he had met there would expect too much. They were hardly American at all; they had the ways and habits of thought of people in his own class—and yet he could not quite take them upon that footing. Marrying one of those girls, whose fathers had Scotch shooting boxes, and who seemed to know the London season just a trifle more thoroughly—as they were a bit sharper in everything—than he himself did, was not what he wanted at all. He had the old fashioned theory of marrying an American girl—to sail away with her and her fortune, and leave her relatives on their native shore.

Miss Sanderson appeared to represent the proper type exactly, but he was in no particular hurry. He had unlimited faith in his own power of marrying the American girl. He had a good

position, and his carelessly sowed wild oats had never grown tall enough to cast a deep shadow over it. He thought that he had mowed down the one stalk which showed any tendency to do so. This morning, however, Mrs. Sanderson had put a new idea into his head.

"You must forgive me for giving you a bit of a warning," she said laughingly. "But my husband has a young follower who is a little troublesome at times. I cannot tell Mr. Sanderson that young Mr. Batterman is an annoyance, but sometimes I wish I were less scrupulous," she went on, with a comically humorous smile. "He is allowed to do pretty much what he likes in the guise of a lifelong friend. The last thing was to annoy my stepdaughter by trying to make love to her. If the manifestation happens to be exhibited to you in any unpleasant fashion, I beg that you will consider this an apology."

And Lurgan had laughed: "I used to have a cousin who was a chap like that. Indeed, I have him yet. He was so good we couldn't turn him out, but we used to wish we could."

But not long after, when Alice came in to say "Good morning," and Batterman's rather set face and somewhat stiff manner followed her, Lurgan could not prevent putting into his manner a certain embarrassment for which he assuredly had not planned. It was perhaps as much a sur-

prise to him as to Batterman that she answered him as she did, and came to sit beside him. Her color was brilliant and high, and her tongue ran along in the gayest girlish talk, while Chris' face grew harder every moment, and the point of his chin more determined. When he had declined the coffee Mrs. Sanderson pressed upon him, he arose, and deliberately seated himself within two feet of Alice.

Lurgan settled himself in his chair. If he was to be shut up in a house, certainly they could not have provided him with a better piece of amusement. When Lurgan was a little boy, he had been found one day, carrying an armful of kittens from their native loft out into the rain. It was discovered, upon investigation, that he had done the same thing three or four times in the course of the morning. It had afforded him a complete satisfaction to see the anxious mother cat pick them up one by one and carry them laboriously up ladders until she supposed them safe again. The present worry of Batterman gave him something of the same pleasure. He cynically believed that this pretty girl was merely showing him off, letting her poor Western lover see that she was quite able to have an English peer in her train ; and he was ready to assist her.

"You Americans are quite too luxurious," he was saying. "I shall have nothing to offer you

at my place when you come over next year. It was only the other day that we had steam put into Salby Chase. I can keep you warm, which we consider a luxury ; but all this beautiful lighting and ventilating business we haven't reached."

"But you will have many other things," Alice said. "'To one who has been unfortunate enough to fill several years' memory space with the ways of a raw mining town, age and moss and traditions are part of heaven.'"

"We can give you all of those, but are you certain, Miss Sanderson, that you would not want your mining camp again?"

"Now you are being unpleasant. Must I have my fitness for the wild corners of the earth thrust upon me? Do I so surely carry the mark of it? Must I be condemned to remain in an environment like that?"

"You might make a 'part of heaven' of even that," Lurgan said audaciously, conscious of the man's face behind hers.

"But I do not wish to," she hastily answered.

"Then it is quite certain that you may have any part of the earth you want. Take mine. Salby Chase is at your disposal. It is old enough, and mossy enough, and crammed full of tradition. We have every sort of a story, and a family portrait to authenticate most of them. My

people have been tradition makers. They never knew how to die decently in their beds. They were always taken off in the midst of something, leaving a ghost behind to 'finish the job,' as you people say."

"Do not be too generous," the girl said, conscious, too, almost hysterically conscious, of the face behind her. "You might repent."

Not only was Batterman perplexed, but his good taste was wounded. He recognized the almost insolent tone of the man who lay there in the chair, and his hand ached to strike him. His was not the peevish nature which could blame Alice. He did not understand her, but the dogged loyalty of years would not let him believe that her words and actions, in this short hour, were a real contradiction of the character of the girl he had known so long and so well. He took himself sharply in hand, and wondered if he were not mistaken, if his sensitive nerves were not exaggerating the light talk of a young girl to a guest in her father's house. He scorned himself for foolish and unmanly jealousy.

Yet all the reasoning in the world would not make less tight the tension of his heart and brain. Stronger and stronger grew his determination that he must put Alice's heart to the test of words now. His talk with her father had changed everything, since only yesterday. He

would not take even the evidences of his own senses against her. She must tell him. It was probably just such girlish talk as this that had misled her father into thinking she cared for Lurgan. He would have been more than human had he not blamed her a little, but Batterman was of that best type of American manhood which allows an almost unlimited latitude to the pure, good woman he loves. He did not measure her by anything like his own standard.

He had an attitude of waiting which delighted Lurgan, which was food for the Englishman's vanity, but which made Mrs. Sanderson uneasy. She had known Batterman a long time, she knew that he was not one who gave up anything easily, and she could see in his face something of which Lurgan, with his thick shell of self admiration, and his belittlement of all mankind not born in his own order, was quite unconscious—an expression of distaste and contempt. If Alice once became aware of this attitude of Batterman's, her mother knew that all hope of marrying her to Lurgan might as well be given up. She might crucify the girl's heart for pride's sake, but she could not take away her belief in Batterman's judgment. Alice would be likely to cling to that with all of a young girl's romanticism, all the more because she must give him up as a lover.

Mrs. Sanderson needed every moment of Lur-

gan's stay for the furthering of her plans, and she needed an open field. She had never won any of her battles by timid methods. She knew that it is the bold stroke which counts. She had taken a few minutes to get Connie safely out of the way, and then she came back from the conservatory with a butterfly orchid on her handsome, round, ringless finger.

"Are you interested in orchids, Lord Lurgan?" she asked as she held it out. "It is a new craze with me, and like all late devotees, I am mad on the subject."

"I know less about them than about anything on earth, but I think they are no end lovely." He took the flower, and dropped it casually on Alice's shoulder after he had admired it for a second. Her dress was cut a little low in the neck, and its purplish pinkness was a delicate contrast to the girl's white skin, on which one of the petals rested. In an instant Batterman was on his feet, and had brushed the flower to the floor. Then he stooped and picked it up, and handed it to Lurgan as if he supposed that he had dropped it accidentally, and was unable through his lameness to recover it.

Mrs. Sanderson spoke hastily.

"I am going to ask you to come into the conservatory and see my orchids. I have not many, but I think they look rather well."

At a signal two men came forward, and half lifted and half rolled the invalid chair out of the room, while Mrs. Sanderson kept up a loud, gay chatter.

Batterman filled up the doorway, and turned to Alice.

VI.

AS Batterman thus took possession of her, a protest arose in Alice's mind. She dreaded the interview. She did not know what she was going to do or say. She only conned one lesson over and over and over in her mind. She must, she *must*, tell him that it was all a mistake, that she did not love him, that he had entirely mistaken her. She wished he had seen that she was trying to tell him so, and had gone away without giving her this awful trial and making her tell the awful lie that was before her. But there was nothing left but to tell it, and to put into it all the meaning of which she was capable.

"I came here this morning with your father's sanction," Batterman began. At the mention of her father all the color died out of Alice's face, and she winced. "I came to say something to you which I tried to say yesterday. You must hear me now, Alice. Will you come into the library? I think we shall be undisturbed there."

"Yes, I will come."

Determined to believe in her as he was, Batterman could not fail to notice the great difference

in her manner between today and yesterday. It was exactly what he would expect of a woman who had been vulgarly "flirting." He would not let his mind contemplate such a possibility. Her father's words of a few hours ago came back to him. Perhaps he was taking a young girl too seriously ; he was ready to begin to allow as much ; but Alice ! He had seen her grow up in her frank maidenhood ; she was so sincere, so genuine.

He turned as she preceded him through the library door, and closed it gently behind her. Then, all his fine self showing out of his kind, grave eyes, Batterman stood before her. He did not get a chair for her. They both realized that a great moment had come in their lives, and they stood to meet it. He had intended to say such gentle, tender things to her when the crisis came. He had had plenty of time to think of it. But now he spoke abruptly, and brought out that hackneyed old sentence which has done duty in novels and plays until it is known as well as the marriage service, though it seldom does actual service under natural circumstances.

"Alice," he said, "I have come here to tell you that I love you with all my heart, more than all the world beside, and to ask you to be my wife."

Batterman's voice was full of feeling, and to

the trembling girl who had put out a hand and picked up some trifle from the table before her, blinded, bewildered by her own emotion, it vibrated like a chord on some great organ. She drew in her breath and swallowed something. What she wanted to do, what she felt that she must do, was to put her head on the front of Chris' coat and tell him all about it. He would understand her and tell her exactly what to do. It was Chris, whom she knew so well; Chris, who knew the instant solution to every difficulty; Chris, who had just told her, although she knew it already, that he loved her more than all the world beside; Chris, whom she was in the habit of believing implicitly. Here was peace and rest, and the end of every burden, particularly that big black one which had come in her step-mother's hand this morning, and which was crushing her heart and, it seemed to her, her life.

She clasped her hands and looked at him with a real appeal, which Chris could hardly resist. Perhaps, if Batterman had been a little less of the chivalrous gentleman he was, had had a grain of coarse assurance, he would have utterly demolished her point of view, and shattered her determination. If Alice, young, trusting, in her heart half believing that it was all a mistake, could once have reached the haven of his arms,

she never would have left it. But he stood waiting, and she hesitated. His words, as the form of them was shaped in her mind, sounded perfunctory. Of course they were the lesson he had learned and had come to say. With her vivid imagination she thought of him as being overcome with self pity as he said them. Of course this was a good and honorable man; a declaration of love he considered her due, and he would not disappoint her.

"I am very sorry you have told me this," she said in a tone so low that it was with difficulty that he caught her words. "I do not—I cannot——" Then she caught Batterman's eyes. His face was grave to sternness. She held up her head with something like defiance. "I am afraid I have misled you, Mr. Batterman." Her voice was calm to coldness. "You have taken my friendship for—something else."

"Yes, I have," Batterman said quite simply. "I believed that you loved me, or I should not have spoken."

Again the color flamed in her cheeks, at this seeming corroboration of what she had heard. It hardened her heart.

"I did not, I do not, I never have. It is all a mistake. I am very sorry—I am sorry you ever felt it necessary to speak."

Batterman was silent for a moment which

seemed like an eternity to Alice. The toy she had picked up from the table claimed her attention again, and she looked it over minutely. She never saw it again without a sick remembrance of that hour.

“ I am sorry too,” he said, “ but for one thing. It is wrong that any woman as young as you are should have the love of a man she does not care for brought to her. It was all my mistake. I put into your heart, in fancy, something of what was in my own. It has been a fairy tale. Well ” —he reached over and took her hands into his big, strong ones—“ I am going away today.”

“ Going away? Where? ”

There was consternation in her tone. It almost made Batterman laugh in pure bitterness of spirit. She could stand here calmly after he had believed that he had seen the love of a woman in her face, in her tones, and in her eyes, ever since she had been a woman, and tell him that it had all been a mistake; and then in the next moment she gave him a new proof of her love. What could he think, when her eyes grew dark and her face pale at the mention of his going away?

“ I am going to New Mexico to look at some mines which your father thinks of buying. I would not have gone had you had a different word for me today, but it is best for both of us that this should be ‘ good by.’ ”

"Yes," she said. Then, because she was young, and because she loved him, and because she could scarcely do without him, and because of a thousand things which culminated in an impulse, she held his hands and said :

"I do not wish you to go."

"Alice," Batterman said, "do not trifle with me. Tell me. Do you love me?" And as she did not answer, he went on, "You do love me. What does this mean?"

"I do not," she said proudly, "but I will not have you go away on my account." She was mistress of herself again, all womanly pride. She must show him that it was all a mistake, that she was not to be pitied, or to be married because she was her father's daughter. Better anything than that. He should stay and see that she did not love him.

"I will not drive you away into the wilderness, and I will not have you change our friendship. You must stay."

"You ask too much of me."

"Will it mean so much to you that my father will know that you have supposed I loved you when I did not?"

Batterman dropped her hands in astonishment. This was an Alice he did not know, and whom he was beginning to think that he never had known.

“ Were it to do a service to you, I would stay,” he said. “ We will try and forget that I have been so foolish.”

He turned away toward the door, and she stood there. A great wave of tenderness for her went through him, and he went back and took her hands.

“ Alice,” he said, “ I am glad I spoke, for one reason. I want you to know that at any time or in any place where it is possible for me to do you a service, you have only to call me. I will come from any quarter of the earth, and will give you the best that I have to offer.”

He looked at her for a moment. She did not thank him, for she could not speak. He held her hands tightly, and then let them fall, and a few seconds later Alice heard the lock of the front door close with Batterman outside.

VII.

THE subject of Batterman's changed attitude toward Alice was not mentioned by any of the family, though perhaps only Connie was unconscious of it. Mr. Sanderson looked wistfully at his daughter, and once his wife caught him following her from the dinner table into the drawing room. Mrs. Sanderson hastily broke off a conversation with Lord Lurgan, and went in pursuit. Her husband's attention was always easily diverted to herself, and she kept the words from being spoken which might have turned aside a stream of events.

Christopher had gone back to the office and told Mr. Sanderson that he was right so far as Alice's indifference to himself was concerned ; but he could not believe yet that she found in Lurgan the ideal of her girlish fancy. Perhaps it was vanity, and it may have been instinct, which made him reason in this way.

"I am ready to go to New Mexico, sir," he had said finally ; and that night he saw the lights of the villages which make the outskirts of Chicago flash by him.

For the first time in his life he knew the real meaning of loneliness. He had become an orphan at sixteen, and had been obliged to leave school then. He had joined an expedition that was surveying the route of a new railroad, and by the time he was nineteen was in command of a squad of workmen under the chief engineer. This man, self made himself, liked the clever, well bred boy, and took him to South America. A revolution, and the death of the man who was his friend, threw Batterman on the world at twenty, with the assurance and experience of most men of forty. He had accepted Mr. Sanderson's offer of a place at the Gray Colt mine, and he had been the Chicago capitalist's constructor and adviser ever since. He had known what it was to live for weeks without ever seeing even a printed word in English, to lie out under the stars at night on a high Peruvian mountain, a thousand miles from anywhere, with only Portuguese laborers near him. He had been homeless, and without a close friend, but life and its good had all been before him. Now that he had lost something which he had discovered to be part of the very fiber of his soul—the hope, the ever growing certainty, that Alice Sanderson was to make up to him for all things—he felt a gap which it would take years to fill. The air castle to which all his roads led was in ruins, and as he had not

the strength of mind to make new ones, or to turn back, he could only stand still and look at the wreck of his hopes, and try as best he could to explain to himself why the disaster had been so complete.

Even yet he clung to his belief in Alice. He even let his mind dwell for a moment upon the sensational theory that she had been hypnotized. How could her whole character seemingly change in one night?

Before he left Chicago, however, Batterman had found time to do one thing, for which some people will doubtless condemn him. He cabled to an old friend in London, one of the few close friends he had ever made—a quiet, studious man, who had left the wild life of an active mining engineer to become an attaché of a great London office. His message asked for the fullest particulars of the life of the Earl of Lurgan, and the general estimate of his character. He gave Clayton full liberty to go about making these discoveries in any way he chose. It was not a course he felt like suggesting to Mr. Sanderson, and he saw already that Mrs. Sanderson would keep her husband from doing it upon his own account. He directed the answer sent to the post office nearest to the mines in New Mexico. He would stay there for a month, at any rate, within which period he expected a reply to reach him.

When he reached his destination, Batterman found a state of affairs he had not expected. He reflected grimly that by her refusal of him, and by his consequent coming down here, he had probably added a million or so to Miss Alice Sanderson's fortune. The mine had virtues which neither its first owner nor the Olla Smelter people had discovered, and he immediately telegraphed this fact to Mr. Sanderson, strongly advising him to buy the property and begin work at once.

The answer he received astonished him. Mr. Sanderson felt that he had mines enough, and he would not touch this one. Batterman wrote the strongest possible letter, still urging the purchase. The reply he received was vague and full of kindness, but still declining to take the property, and giving as a reason the fact that Mrs. Sanderson had grown alarmed at so much of her husband's fortune being invested in mines, and had asked him to give her a promise that he would go into no more ventures of this description.

The situation was embarrassing for Batterman, as he had practically given his word that the property would be taken. For half a dozen years he had been in the habit of closing negotiations of this sort for Sanderson, but the letter ignored this fact entirely. Almost all one moonlight

night he sat by the door of the little wooden "shack" where he was living, and thought the matter over. Perhaps, after all, it was best that he should let the break come now. His modest savings were sufficient to make a payment on this mine. He had about thirty thousand dollars. If his belief in it were correct, the millions which came out of it would be his own.

He wrote to Sanderson and told him that he felt in honor bound to take the mine, and as his employer refused to carry out the bargain, he would do so in his own name. A few days later, when a reply came, he felt that he was growing sore and sensitive when Mr. Sanderson's letter read to him almost like the words of a man who was relieved of a responsibility. He could not know how Mrs. Sanderson had used every argument at her command to bring about this state of affairs; how she had made her gentle, kind, yielding husband believe that the happiness of his daughter depended upon it. Mr. Sanderson offered him any help it was in his power to give, and commended him for the desire to take up a business for himself, quite ignoring his often expressed hope of presently making the young man his partner in fact and name, as he had long been in action. But Batterman did not allow one disloyal thought to one who had been his friend so long. Now, as always, he pushed away

from him the consciousness of the older man's weaknesses, and wrote, thanking him for his kindness, but accepting none of his offers.

It was time for the report to come from London, and when the month wore on and it did not appear, Batterman telegraphed again.

Clayton's answer was prompt: "Mailed full statement twentieth."

This was now the thirty first, and any day Chris might expect to get information which he felt he might have to send on to Chicago. He set his teeth as he realized that he would probably be called a meddlesome coward in case there was any reason why Lurgan should not be the familiar inmate of the household where Alice lived. The superstition which would allow a man to shield another when they were both lovers of the same woman had no sort of weight with him. Perhaps he was too primitive, but he saw no reason why he should not look out for dangers for the woman he loved, and try to shield her from them even though she were not for him.

It was a long gallop over the sun baked mesa to the little platform station where the train passed once a day, but Batterman made it himself, evening after evening, his broad sombrero flapping before his face and cooling the still, hot air of that Southern country.

At last the letter arrived, and with it came a thick, creamy envelope directed in a schoolgirl's hand which he recognized as Connie's. The latter he put in his pocket. The temptation to read it first was almost irresistible ; it would be full of news of Alice ; but he was going to know the contents of this other letter first. It was written in the precise hand of Clayton, and every word contained therein appeared to be quite to the point :

DEAR CHRIS :

The Earl of Lurgan belongs to a family which has not done anything, for a hundred years, to publicly disgrace itself ; but some members of it have needed help to keep out of trouble. The earl's mother is an eccentric lady who apparently believed that boys were spoiled by being kept in too tight a rein ; consequently, she gave her son none at all. At twenty, he had an establishment which was talked about, but I believe that generally it is supposed to be a thing of the past. It seemed, however, worth looking into. I find that a cottage in the very grounds of Salby Chase is occupied by a young widow who lives there with a companion, does a great deal of charitable work, and is now and then called upon by the rector's wife. The Dowager Lady Lurgan never pays her any attention, but she must know that Mrs. Welles is the lady who assisted her son to receive his friends ten years ago, as it was she who turned the establishment out of doors. That is about all. He has great estates, but both he and his mother are in debt. Does he want to buy a mine or marry your chief's daughter ?

Yours as always,

CLAYTON.

" I knew there was something about the brute," Chris said, and he opened Connie's letter. Inside

was another envelope, thick and white, with a few lines scribbled on it :

DEAR CHRIS :

I found you had not had your invitation, although we are so stylish that the others have been gone a week. Think of Alice being "her ladyship" !

CONNIE.

His hands trembled so that he could hardly pull out the cards which told him that he was asked to the marriage of "their daughter, Alice, to George John Algernon, Earl of Lurgan, on the 10th day of December."

This was the 5th. It would take him four days to get to Chicago.

VIII.

IT was on the morning of Alice's wedding day that Batterman sprang out of a cab before the great doors of the Sanderson house. There was an air of festivity throughout the place. Two carriages stood at the side, under the wide porte cochère, with wedding favors at the horses' heads and on the men who stood ready to take them out. It was old Granger who let him in, or he would probably have been told that none of the family could possibly be seen this morning. The ceremony was to be at twelve, and the bride would leave the house in an hour. But Granger let him into the library.

"It is Mr. Sanderson who will be glad of a minute to say how d'ye do, Mr. Batterman, sir," old Granger said. "I will speak to him."

But Mr. Sanderson was not allowed to come down for more than a moment alone. As Granger knocked at his dressing room door, it was Mrs. Sanderson who looked out of her own to ask what was wanted. When she heard that it was Batterman, a frown drew itself between her eyebrows for the first time that day.

She had felt almost as if she were walking on air. Her own success bewildered her. She could scarcely believe that she had been able to play with Alice's feelings, and with the paternal anxiety of her husband, until she had brought this to pass. It had been frankness between her and Lurgan after the first two days, and they laid their plans together. In the short space of three weeks, Alice had promised to marry the young Englishman, and had said that she did not care at all how soon it came off. What possible difference did it make to her? She might as well do what everybody expected of her. Lurgan was pleasant, and ready, and quite unobtrusive. He did not offend her by love making. Of course, her own fancy was caught by the thought of being an English peeress, and—her speedy marriage would teach Batterman how greatly mistaken he had been in thinking that she loved him. Never, never, she told herself, could she wipe out the shame of that humiliation.

Of course, to the wise and elderly, and to those to whom the temptation of salving wounded pride and becoming a countess at the same time has never been given, all these reasons are contemptible; but to Alice, a young girl who felt that her heart and her love were dead forever, they were quite sufficient. She had not been allowed time to think—Mrs. Sanderson had at-

tended to that. Now, in this hour before they set out for the church, that lady thought she had earned a moment's respite from vigilance, and here was the tiresome Batterman obtruding himself.

"Richard," she called to her husband, "if you are going to see Mr. Batterman, ask him to come up here. I should like to see him, too."

And when Batterman handed out the letter which Clayton had written, it was to see it passed into Mrs. Sanderson's hands.

"Why do you bring us this vulgar piece of gossip, Mr. Batterman?" she asked with extreme haughtiness.

"I cannot call it a vulgar piece of gossip, Mrs. Sanderson. It cannot be too late to save Alice until she is actually married to this man. You know that her happiness is more to me than all the world beside."

"I can hardly believe that, when you come to bring the blight of a scandal upon her wedding day. She is about to marry a young man who is in every way a suitable match for her, who loves her, and whom she loves. It is insulting to both of them that a discarded suitor should be allowed to come to her father, at this hour, and carry tales to the discredit of the man she is to marry. Christopher Batterman, I never supposed you were jealous and spiteful."

Mrs. Sanderson would have liked to order Batterman out of the house, but she had had a glimpse of her husband's face, and saw him more moved than she had ever known him. She could only try to belittle the accuser; but Sanderson put his hand on her arm with a silencing gesture.

"I do not think this an idle thing. If this is true, it should be told to Alice. In any case, Lurgan should be asked to deny it."

"You know it cannot be true."

"I know Clayton," her husband said.

"At least it cannot be true that that—person is there now. You cannot—oh, Richard!" Mrs. Sanderson clasped her hands and tears came into her eyes; and even as she cried she thought that tear marks would be expected of her on a day like this. "You cannot ruin the child's happiness, and cover her with humiliation on her wedding day, for a bit of hearsay gossip about an indiscretion of a man's youth. It is impossible. If you stopped the marriage now, Alice would never hold up her head again. And Connie! *I* can remember that we have more than one child."

Sanderson looked at her and wavered.

"She loves Lurgan. You see she loves him, and he loves her. You have seen men who had not been saints in their boyhood turn into strong men and good husbands."

"She is right, Batterman," Mr. Sanderson said at last. "I have not the heart to go to her now with this story."

"But you should go to Lurgan with it."

"Nor that!" Mrs. Sanderson said, and she threw the paper into the open fire. "Pardon me, Mr. Batterman, but I must ask you to excuse us. You have made us both miserable, but I will not consent to your making others unhappy."

"The carriages are ready, madam," the man at the door announced.

"You go up to Alice and bring her down," Mrs. Sanderson said hastily, turning to her husband; and before Batterman quite realized it, he was walking down the hall, was on the staircase, every step seemingly bringing him to his own execution.

Up stairs Alice was turning about to take a last look into the pretty room she was leaving. It was only the other day she had come here, wild with delight at all the pleasures of life before her, and—she felt it with a dull ache which seemed to her as if it would never stop—conscious of a strong, deep human love which she told herself was dead forever now. What mattered it what became of this stupid, unfeeling Alice Sanderson? They called her again, the maids and her mother and Connie and her father surrounded her, telling her of late arrived presents, of a thousand things.

She hardly knew how she got through the ceremony. She seemed to be walking in a mist. Voices sounded afar. There were flowers and lights and music; she said some words, and then she turned away, having exchanged her father's arm for another, which was larger and firmer, but not so familiar. She had only one shock of consciousness, and that was at the door, when she looked up and saw Batterman's white face. He had not gone into the church. Her heart contracted, her step was unsteady for a moment, and then, poor child, she remembered that it was that Chris might see it all that she had come to this place. And then confusion settled about her again, and she was left to think her own thoughts.

She had a feeling of repulsion when Lurgan put his hand on hers in the carriage, and she gently drew away. She did not dislike him, but he disturbed her. There was the rush of the breakfast, the change of dress, the drive to the private car which was to take them all to New York. It was all so unnatural, that one more touch, in having Lurgan almost always beside her, was hardly noticeable.

It was only at last, when the steamer left its dock, and she stood on the deck, waving good by to her people on the pier, that a little thrilling consciousness of what she had done possessed her.

They were rapidly moving down the bay, and New York and America were becoming parts of the landscape, when she turned and looked at the man beside her, and realized that he was her husband. For him she had given up home and country and friends, and to her he was a stranger.

IX.

THE demesne of Salby Chase was a large one, but like most properties in the agricultural counties of England, it had suffered from depression during the past ten years. Lurgan had done absolutely nothing to improve it by helping his people. His mother had had almost complete control of the estate ; all he asked was an income, and he did not receive enough to keep him from contracting debts, against which the dowager had not remonstrated.

“ Boys will be boys, and Lurgan will marry a wife one of these days,” she always said comfortably. There was an ingrained selfishness in him upon which she thoroughly relied, knowing its workings within herself. And now he had done exactly what she had advised and supposed he would do when he went to America—brought home a rich wife.

Lady Lurgan was waiting for their arrival at Salby Chase this February evening, with a house party of guests about her. Steam had been put through the old building, but for all that logs of burning wood sent their pungent odors through

the house. A more or less talkative group gathered about the tea table when Lady Lurgan poured tea. Most of the people had something of the look of herself and her son, and as a matter of fact they were all more or less distantly related. Their dark skins, eyes a trifle too close together, and narrow foreheads showed people of the same racial characteristics. Lady Lurgan's teeth were large, and a trifle prominent when she talked, and she wore a headdress made of a lace handkerchief which gave her an appearance of being crowned. Her hands, as they moved about over the cups and saucers, were full of nervous force and energy. Unlike Mrs. Sanderson, she did not feel that she was too rich to wear rings, for her fingers were covered with them, many of dim old stones in antique settings. They were the hands of a strong woman, with considerable imagination.

Only a few feet from the dowager sat her niece, Lady Fortescue, who was a curious commentary upon her aunt's appearance, showing as she did what Lady Lurgan might have looked like long ago, when the flame of youth burned within her. Nobody ever passed Lady Fortescue by without a second look. She was taller by an inch or two than almost any woman she knew. The others said that that last inch, at least, was due to artificial aid, because it was only after giantesses be-

came fashionable that she took it on. She was delightfully slender, with the sweet roundness of a very young girl, although she was past thirty. There could be no doubt that the color in her hair and cheeks was genuine, for she threatened to dye her hair black, because its natural bright blonde tint was unfashionable and "vulgar" for the moment; and besides, her color varied as she moved and spoke. But it was her eyes and mouth that held everybody with a momentary stare of wonder. Her thick brows, darker than her hair, met in a point over her nose, making heavy marks that would have been disproportionate to most eyes. But Lady Fortescue had a pair of lamps which would have asserted themselves had they been placed under a bushel. Nobody ever knew exactly what color they were—only that they were big and very brilliant. They were conspicuous enough when their owner's face was in repose, but when she smiled, with full crimson lips parted over teeth as brilliant as her eyes, the effect was almost startling. A jealous woman once said that Lady Fortescue reminded her of the wolf in the story of *Red Ridinghood*, but everybody else thought her remark stupid as well as unkind.

Theo Fortescue had not married until comparatively late. She had no fortune, and people generally thought she would end by marrying

some susceptible young man years her junior. There was always at least one of them dying of love for her, waiting at her elbows to fetch and carry. People even settled upon Lord Lurgan as her possible husband, but the dowager knew better than that. That worldly mother was in the habit of calling attention to the success with which she had brought up her son, and frankly naming some of her methods for keeping him out of the way of designing "husband hunters." In her heart she knew that her niece did not care one straw for Lurgan, and did not want to marry him; but she did not know when Theo might see fit to change her mind. It was a relief to everybody when she finally accepted old Lord Fortescue, who was a new baron, if he was sixty five, and who needed somebody to spend the money which had come in from his Cornish mines. His wife was doing it admirably.

Standing with his back to the blaze, cutting the heat off from about one third of the room, was a brother in law of Lady Lurgan's, who was accepting his nephew's marriage with all the philosophy that could be expected of a man whose home seemed likely to be broken up. When the late Earl of Lurgan died, his widow brought her husband's brother, the Hon. Captain Alfred Innis, to Salby Chase, as her assistant in its management. Captain Innis had served first in a crack

cavalry troop and then in a line regiment, but early in his career, without one word of explanation—unless it was privately talked over between him and his colonel—he had sent in his papers, and come back from India to private life.

“It seems to me, Cecilia,” Captain Innis was saying, “that you might have kept that tea out until the bride came. She’s getting a dismal enough welcome as it is—no arches, no joy bells, no grateful tenantry, and now cold tea.”

“There will be fresh brought in for her, and since she is inevitably going to upset so many of our ways, I do not see why we should all begin to go thirsty so soon. She can keep us waiting for tea tomorrow if she cares to.”

“Or give us none at all,” Lady Fortescue put in vivaciously. “I hear that Americans do not serve it except upon ‘days,’ as they call them. It is not a meal with them, but a function. They dress it up. They only have it once a week or a fortnight, and then they put green vines and expensive roses on a pink satin tablecloth, and dress young girls in ball gowns to pour the tea out, and serve sweets and salted nuts with it. Aunt Cecilia, you should have pretended that this was a ‘day,’ and have let me wear my yellow tulle and pour the tea for the bride.”

“Why isn’t anybody at the station? Why this gathering, as if the new Lady Lurgan was a

will that was going to be read?" a young man in a golf suit asked.

"My dear boy, that is the case exactly," Lady Fortescue said. "She's the will. We have read some of the paragraphs, and we are carrying them out. Algernon wrote that they wanted no demonstration of any sort. I believe an American reporter has followed them all the way across the ocean to see their arrival, and to telegraph the meetings and the demonstrations. Probably he belongs to a rival paper to that owned by Lady Lurgan's papa."

"Does he own a newspaper?"

"My dear ignorant child! They all do. All those American millionaires own papers, which are kept by them to further their business interests and to report the gowns of their wives and daughters."

"Well, I hope Lady Lurgan will have some pretty ones," the blunt young man said tactlessly. "I hear they can simply knock out our women at dressing."

"Doubtless," Lady Fortescue said dryly.

There was no time for anything more, for the opening of the great hall door could be heard, and Lady Lurgan arose with precipitation, and with a little paleness in her cheek. She was a woman who prided herself upon being practical, but it was a great deal to her to have her only

son bring home his bride, the woman who had taken her own name and title, who would sit in the seat which had been hers so long, and who would probably be the mother of the Earls of Lurgan to come. Her imagination sent pictures of varying possibilities before her mind's eye. She intended to be all that was possible to this young foreigner. In her heart she despised her a little, as one who had come with money in her hand to buy a title ; but they would have the great common interest of wishing to build up the estate and keep Lurgan within bounds. Lady Lurgan was determined to be friends with the newcomer if possible.

But she almost stopped short when she saw the bride, so different was the reality from her expectation. Alice had put on a long traveling cloak of dark cloth with a pearl lining, and as she threw it back, her fine, delicate figure in its dark, plain gown was relieved against it. Her eyes looked from a white face into those of Lady Lurgan with almost an appeal. It would have moved most women to take the slender, almost childish creature into their arms and comfort her, to assure her that her troubles were over and that she had a haven at last. But to Lady Lurgan it meant the strongest repulsion.

"She looks as if she were trying to tell the world that Algy beats her," she thought bitterly.

"She has no pluck, no backbone. She is going to whine."

A positive feeling of rage possessed her, and the friendliness and concern that had been in her face a moment earlier all died away.

"I know you are very tired," she said after the introductions had been made, and Lurgan had greeted his relatives and friends, who were saying all sorts of congratulatory things to him; "but a cup of fresh tea will revive you. For my part I cannot see why you came home now. It would have been far wiser to have remained on the continent until May or the first of June, as you did not come home in November. This is the season when all the clever people who can afford it go to the Riviera."

Alice's face flushed crimson. She had learned, in the months since her marriage, that there was a bluntness of speech which was quite harmless and meaningless, though she had never been accustomed to it; but the reference to "affording" touched her in a tender spot. They had met a great many English people in Rome and Paris and Vienna during their months abroad, and always and everywhere there had been more or less frank allusions to her money, and to Lurgan's good fortune in securing it. She had longed to get to some place she might call "home." It was hardly that she was homesick

for Chicago. The great house there had never seemed home-like. It was like some brilliant pavilion upon a road, in which she had stopped to dance and make merry. She had a sense, sometimes, that she had no home. The house out by the mine, where the roses grew over the window, and where Chris came to luncheon and dinner, was home. She put that thought out of her mind, however, ignoring it as quickly as possible. It was something to which she must not let herself hark back for a moment.

Perhaps she would find home at Salby Chase. She had several photographs of the beautiful old house, with its different orders of architecture so blended and covered over by ivy, and set about with terraces, that any incongruity was forgotten. She had put them out where she could look at them and dream about them as they wandered about the continent. Lurgan was good natured, ready to amuse her, and not very troublesome, and she had the respect for him which any unspoiled young girl has for the man she marries. She felt that a great happiness could never be hers—no, never ! But she could and would have a home. And this was it—this house full of people who looked at her curiously as if she were a barbarian from some unknown corner of the earth. She had already acquiesced in Lurgan's wish that his mother should live with them. She

had no wish to be quite alone with her husband ; but she had not expected to be told that she was a fool for coming home.

"Perhaps, Lady Lurgan," Lady Fortescue began, and then hesitated. "Or Alice—I may call you Alice, may I not? I hear that there are no end of Alices in America since that queer song of Mr. Du Maurier's became a fad over there. Are you a genuine Alice, or are you a *Sweet Alice* of 'Ben Bolt' creation?"

"I was christened Alice, I believe," young Lady Lurgan said, a little stiffly.

"Now that is another interesting thing that I *do* want to ask you about. I have heard that there are hundreds and thousands of Americans that were never christened at all. They just give their children names, and if the children choose, they change them when they grow up."

"Oh, I know a better story than that, Theo," Lurgan put in. "I heard it in Chicago. They have a railroad out there called the 'St. Paul.' A very religious gentleman, who builds sectarian colleges and all that sort of thing, went down into 'the Street,' as they call Wall Street in New York, and, as the Americans say, everlastingly squeezed it dry through operating in 'St. Paul.' So, feeling rich and generous, he put up a big stained glass window in his college chapel, the design of which is 'The Conversion of St. Paul.' "

In the general laugh Alice stood up.

"I am very tired," she said, "and if you will allow me, I will go up for a little while before dinner."

"Yes, indeed," Lady Lurgan replied hastily ;
"I will show you your rooms myself."

"Do, mother," Lurgan said. "I want to run around the stables for half an hour. I bought some horses in Vienna, and I want to see where I am to put them."

But after he had held the door open for his mother and his wife to pass through, he did not turn toward the stables. Lady Fortescue had seated herself in a great Turkish chair, and put the toes of her satin slippers on the fender. Her big eyes were blazing and her mouth was open. Lurgan looked back at her, and saw a woman he could understand. With a certainty of being in loose and easy mental garments, he went back, sat down beside her on an ottoman, and picked up a plate of cake. One could talk about anything to Theo.

"What brought you back?" she asked, as if it were a secret.

"Fact is," he said, nursing his knees, "that Alice wanted to come home. I think she wants to settle down. She's probably full of ideas about being the head of a great estate. Wants to go in for charities and that sort of thing."

"Ah! Model cottages, or jelly and blankets?"

"Not much in the model cottage way, I am afraid," Lurgan laughed. "I never could see the sense in making people uncomfortable at your own expense. They don't want to pay any more rent for clean houses than for dirty ones, and the clean ones are not half so picturesque."

"But the jelly and blanket field is pretty well occupied," Lady Fortescue went on pensively. "You already have ladies in the neighborhood who devote a great deal of time to the amelioration of the poor."

"See here, Theo," Lurgan said hastily, "be a little decent to Alice, can't you? She really is an awfully good sort. She hasn't any of those aggressive Yankeeisms that we are always hearing about. She is a credit to this house, and Heaven knows she has put a prop under it."

"Oh, I am going to be decent to her—quite! I think she is beautiful, and really looks very ladylike. A great many of those American women do. They say it is their adaptability, that they have a regular trick of aping everything they see. Now I do not doubt myself that your new wife will presently be more British than the queen herself, who, poor old lady, is mostly German after all. Don't you fear. I intend to be nice to the new Lady Lurgan. She is going to have a big house in town, and do a

lot of entertaining, and all that sort of thing, of course, eh? Now our ship has come in?"

"I suppose so."

"It isn't poor little me who is likely to disturb her peace."

"Do not go hinting about in that beastly fashion," Lurgan said impatiently.

"Hinting about what?" his cousin asked innocently; but Lurgan only looked into the fire and said nothing.

As Alice and Lady Lurgan went up stairs, the young girl could only notice with delight the beautiful old tapestries and carvings everywhere. In the turn of the stair was a beautiful Hoppner portrait of some dead and gone Lady Lurgan surrounded by her four children. Just across was a Lawrence of a beautiful curly haired boy. The dowager stopped.

"These are some pictures which we have just been able to buy back," she said pleasantly. "When Algernon was at Oxford, he was so expensive, and our income was so small, that we sold these pictures when he came of age, with a number of others. Fortunately, these two came into the market again about the time he became engaged to you, and knowing that he would be able to afford to keep the portraits of his ancestors now, and that you, being an American, would attach peculiar value to them, I bought them

back. I hope we shall be able to get the others as time goes by."

"Thank you," Alice said faintly. "They are beautiful."

"Particularly the Lawrence. It is my husband's grandfather. He was killed at twenty eight in a duel in France, after he had eloped with his friend's wife. The earth was rid of a scoundrel when he left it," Lady Lurgan said pleasantly as she passed on. "I used to think Algernon looked like him when he was a boy, but he is more like my people now."

Alice gave a little shudder which reached from her shoulders to her heart. There was the same shape of eye and forehead in the pretty boy, with his curls, as she saw in her husband's face. She tried to wonder what her own great grandfather had been like. She was sure, at any rate, that he had not been killed in a duel.

"Here are your rooms. I hope you will like them. Lurgan had a man come up from London and do them over for you. Where is your maid?"

"I told her she could get a cup of tea. She has had a headache all day."

"I am afraid you are a little lax, my dear," Lady Lurgan said patronizingly. "Is she an American? I hear they always have the headache. I would advise you to get a good Eng-

lish woman at once. I will attend to it for you."

"Thank you," Alice replied sharply. "I think I will keep the maid I have. I have had her some time. She is accustomed to my ways, and although she is French, she is welcome to have a headache now and then."

"My dear, I am afraid you have a temper," Lady Lurgan said. "Rest a while, and then put on one of your pretty American gowns and come down. We dine at eight."

Alice took the long pins from her hat, flung it on the bed, and then, without taking off her coat, dropped into a chair before the fire.

This was "home" !

X.

“THERE is one thing I plainly see, Algy,” Lady Fortescue said, one morning six weeks later. She had been over to the Mediterranean, and had been suddenly called back by the illness of her husband. Neither that nor his recovery had dimmed her color. “That is, that your wife is going to settle down into a pony chaise.”

Lady Fortescue herself had no suggestion of pony chaises about her. She had ridden over, and while her habit had a splash here and there, her shoulders were too broad and her waist too narrow to give any suggestion of rural lanes. She was sitting on a wooden bench in the window of the harness room at Salby Chase, where Lurgan had a desk in which he kept pipes and French novels. He had been looking at her with the admiration he had always felt for her, which, if it had not been always respectful, was at least quite genuine.

“She is spending her time, I hear, going about like some new Lady Bountiful with gifts in her hand. I hear that the tenantry stand

with 'God bless you's' on their lips, their hats in one hand and the other outstretched, whenever she goes by."

"What nonsense! This isn't a comic opera."

"No?"

"Alice amuses herself by giving some toys to the children, I believe. It is rather silly, but if it amuses her, I do not see that it is anybody's business."

"Certainly none of mine," said Theo cheerfully. "But I thought that all the children about here had dolls, and that they were all dressed in black, with neat collars and cuffs."

"Oh, stuff!" Then, catching her eye, his own grew reckless. "They have had time to wear out. The youngsters probably need a new supply."

"And Alice is giving them out this time. But I have——"

"Excuse me, Theo," Lurgan said with some resentment, "but I do not want to hear anything more. The neighborhood must have something to gossip about, I suppose, but I do not believe that it is as full of one subject as you would have me believe. Because a man tells a woman a thing in a fit of weakness, there is no reason why she should never let up on it. That old story is dead and buried. Let me—and the rest—go in peace. We have both forgotten it."

"If that is true, what are some of the 'other

people ' doing here at your very gates, instead of in some other part of the country? "

" If you are talking about the Chase Cottage, it has been empty these months. "

" Ever since your marriage? "

" Yes. "

" But——" Lady Theo began to speak, and then she laughed. A new idea had struck her.

" Forgive my teasing, Algy. You know I never could help it. You are so good never to strike back. Is Alice at home? I will run in to see her ;" and she turned at the door and gave her cousin a smile which made him smile back with half closed eyes, and wonder what Theo was " up to. "

He knew perfectly well that he need never fear that she would betray his confidence. He had tried her too often for that, and she was not the woman to endanger the order of his household by betraying anything unpleasant to his wife. But he knew that there were things Theo had never forgiven him, and that she might slip a rose leaf here and there under his bed of down, to give him an uneasy half hour. It was altogether probable that she had one in her hand now, and had started off to Alice—— He arose to follow her, and then, realizing that that was probably what she wanted him to do, he went back and sat down to his pipe and his novel.

It was a day of contentment with him. Just that day he had paid his last debt, and he had no present necessity for making any new ones. He gave the large and pleased sigh of a man whose conscience is at rest. He was going up to London in a few weeks more, to stay through the season, with a great establishment, with a place in the world which he had never had before. He was married to a lovely young girl, and the whole world knew that she had brought him a large fortune. He would not ruffle his temper by going in there to be made into a shuttlecock for Theo to fling back and forth for her amusement. He could afford to be content.

Lady Fortescue had not far to go. Alice was in her own little sitting room, writing letters, and tying up some packages. She looked up, glad to see her visitor, for, while her husband's cousin was not particularly attractive to her, she still kept the girlish nature which made her enjoy a visit, and she found Lady Theo's ideas of America very amusing.

"Come in," she said cordially. "I have just finished a letter to my young sister."

"Is she also your father's daughter?"

"Yes. We have different mothers."

"And your co-heiress?"

"We never think of it exactly in that way. You may see them over this year. Mother

has just written to ask about a house. She says that father misses me very much, and wishes to come over for the season."

"Ah!" Lady Fortescue said with considerable emphasis. "I advise you to speak to Aunt Cecilia upon the subject. Doubtless she could find exactly the house that you want, or that your father wants. Is he very fond of society, going about, and all that?"

"Not at all, but mother is," Alice answered innocently. "I think she would enjoy a London season very much."

Already Alice was beginning to see that she and America were objects of curiosity to these people, that their habits of mind and ways of thought were entirely different from her own; but she felt a certain security in the thought of her stepmother. Mrs. Sanderson would know how to manage them all. She even had visions of conflicts between her mother and Lady Lurgan, and she could see the suave way in which Mrs. Sanderson would inevitably come off victor.

"Doubtless she would," Lady Fortescue said. "Speak to my aunt about the house. By the way, I hear you are going in for charities and all that sort of thing."

Alice's face flushed. "Not charities. I feel sorry for some of these poor people. They seem to have so little spirit to do anything for them-

selves. They are different from Americans in that way. It is pitiful to see how grateful they are for the least little thing. You know our poor people—at least those who live in the country——” But Lady Fortescue did not let her finish her sentence.

“By the way,” she said in off hand fashion, as she whipped a fleck of dust from her skirt. “You have a rival in charities on this estate. All that sort of thing has been supposed to belong to Mrs. Welles.”

“I do not remember her,” Alice replied. “Is she somebody I ought to know?”

“If you mean is she some one who has called here, no. I believe my aunt has never thought her worth calling upon. She lived until lately in one of the cottages on the estate, but she went away about the time that you were married. I heard today, however, that she had come back to this part of the country, and had taken a place a mile or two away. She had a pony carriage, and used to do a great deal of village visiting. Not exactly of the county families, you know, but interesting. Oh, yes—very interesting. She used to wear black always, so I suppose she was a widow. It used to look just a trifle theatrical to me.”

“Black doesn't sound very theatrical.”

“Oh, yes, it does—with white collars and

cuffs. Mrs. Pat Campbell has worn it in some of her characters until you begin to have an unpleasant association with the costume. But Mrs. Welles did the work you are doing now."

"I suppose I shall meet her," Alice said placidly. "The cottages are all huddled together. They are horrible little places. I am going to suggest pulling them down, and putting up some nice, dry, light American houses for the tenants."

"With bath tubs and all that, I suppose. My dear cousin, if you are going to begin to rip up the traditions of Salby Chase, it is time for me to be going. I might have known that your American enterprise would come out in some fashion;" and Lady Fortescue went laughing toward her aunt's rooms, highly delighted with her morning's work.

"I am simply wild to see how they will stop her if she takes a fancy to the charming Mrs. Welles," she said to herself with hilarity.

On the stairs she ran full into Captain Innis, who was on his way to the rooms of his sister in law, and stopped to speak to him. These two had a decided liking for each other, but often they talked to each other as if they were playing a game in which each might expect a check-mate at any moment.

"See here, Theo," the captain said, "I hear

that that confounded woman is back. What is to be done about it?"

"If I were in your place, I should write a letter to the *Times* and ask what she meant by it," Theo said seriously, and then, smiling brilliantly, went on down stairs. She called back at the next landing :

"I shouldn't tell the family that, if I were you."

XI.

IT was only two days after her talk with Lady Theo that Alice came upon Mrs. Welles. Most of the tenants of the estate lived together in a village about a mile from Salby, which considered itself a town ; but away beyond that, on the other side of what was known as the Home Farm, was a house which had once been a farm house, but which had gradually deteriorated with the decay of the land about it. Money had been needed for drainage and improvements, and the landlords had not been willing to spend it ; but the family which had leased the place for generations had stuck to it with that tenacity which is at once the foundation of England and the origin of some of her great mistakes. They had grown poorer and poorer every year, and the present tenant was a poor wreck of a creature with a houseful of sickly children, who appealed to Alice more than all the others on the estate. She was in a fair way to spoil them by her own pleasure in giving them toys and comforts of which they had never dreamed.

She had ridden there through the fields and

lanes, with a groom behind her. There was a road, but the groom was teaching her to leap fences, and she took them on the road by way of practice. When she turned the corner of the tumbledown house, she was surprised to see, standing by the door, a smart little dog cart with a tiny groom at the horse's head. For a moment she hesitated about going in. But the eldest daughter and housekeeper of Jennings came breathlessly to the door.

"Excuse me, my lady," she said, all in one breath, "but Jimmie's took bad with ashma, my lady, and I'm sendin' Mrs. Welles' gentleman for Dr. Sydney, my lady." The child, hardly fourteen, looked in frightened longing at Turner on the big gray horse. Alice, slipping from her saddle, sent him for the doctor in Salby, and went into the house.

A young woman, who was almost plain of face, except for an expression of habitual good humor, sat by the bed and held up a shriveled little boy on her arm. The noise of the child's painful breathing could be heard all through the room, and his miserable little face was distorted with the pain every respiration caused him.

"What can I do?" Alice asked helplessly.

"There is nothing to do," the young woman answered cheerfully, "except to wait until Dr. Sydney comes. They never keep any medicine

in the house. I think they all take it after the boy gets over an attack. It isn't as bad as it looks. They never die." She looked at Alice keenly, with a rather shrewd but not unkind look in her gray eyes. "You are Lady Lurgan, I suppose. I am Mrs. Welles," she said simply, as if she supposed that Mrs. Welles was as well known as Lady Lurgan. She was not familiar, but she spoke with the perfect assurance of an equal.

Involuntarily Alice wondered why Theo had said that Mrs. Welles always wore black, with white collars and cuffs. Today her dress was a pretty gray, with a bunch of early violets in her bosom. She had thrown her hat off, and her thick reddish brown hair was piled up in a loose bronze knot on top of her head.

"Is it true that it is not dangerous?" Alice asked again. Her cheeks had grown pale at the distressing sounds. The elder sister had gone out.

"Oh, quite, I believe, at least as an acute disease. He will die—eventually, but so will the rest of us. But it hurts the poor little chap. He oughtn't to live in this damp place; but I suppose it is too much to expect it to be drained on his account. It would be easier to take him away."

"Would that cure him?"

"I am sure I do not know. Please do not think I am beginning to beg of you already, Lady Lurgan. I am thinking of sending the little fellow off on my own account. It isn't that I am so fond of him, but I hate to see anybody suffer—physically. It annoys me. It turns my blood, as they used to say in my part of the country."

A few minutes later, when the doctor came, he looked at the two women with some curiosity, and all the time he was bending over his little patient a wrinkle of wonder stood between his eyes. He had met Mrs. Welles before, but this was the first time he had come in contact with the young American wife of the earl, and he was astonished to find them there together. He wondered if a London rumor he had heard could be true, and he also wondered at the ways of Americans.

Alice felt that in some sort Mrs. Welles had been introduced to her by Lady Fortescue's chance remarks, and when they came out of the little house, Mrs. Welles to her dog cart, and Alice to mount her hunter, she said so.

"Lady Fortescue told me that I should find you a rival in my cottages," she remarked.

There was no sign of a start or change of color in Mrs. Welles' face, but she stared back in friendly fashion into Alice's face. If she was

surprised at Lady Fortescue's mention of her name, and had any curiosity concerning its introduction, she made no sign of any sort, but gathered up her reins with entire calmness.

"I have not the pleasure of knowing Lady Fortescue," she said in a most matter of fact tone, as if her failure to know that lady was due entirely to the slightest of accidents. "I live very quietly down here. I did not know that she even knew my name. But I assure you, Lady Lurgan, I am no rival of yours. It is you that have been mine. I was first in the field;" and with a word to her boy, who sprang lightly up behind, and a nod to Alice, she drove rapidly down the muddy road toward the sea.

After a moment's adjustment of her habit, Alice trotted slowly along the same way. There was a fine beach here. The sun was brilliant on it this spring day, and as Alice looked over the water a pang of remembrance came to her which sent the blood surging into her heart, and made her hold tightly to the strap at the side of her saddle. She seemed to see the blue expanse of Lake Michigan before her, and to walk once again along its borders, with Chris Batterman by her side. She never allowed him to come into her mind. She put him resolutely away from her, as one who was buried far out of sight, one whom it would be a crime to remember; but the

sunlit face of the sea was like a picture which had been long turned to the wall, and memory took possession. In that moment she knew that, hide it as she would from her own consciousness, Batterman was always there. The remembrance of him was woven into the very fiber of her being. He was always with her. The little lamp which sometimes illumines our very inmost depths showed her Chris, Chris, always Chris. She measured everything and everybody by his standards, as she knew them, and every act of her life was something that some day he might know.

She was young, and she longed to be happy. Tears of self pity came up into her eyes and ran down her cheeks. She had never heard from Batterman, nor of him, since that day at the church door. She remembered how pale he had looked. She knew he was not dead, for Connie would have written that. The temptation came to her to write to Connie and ask about him ; but no, she could not let her father and mother know that she still thought of him. She struck her horse a sudden blow, and went rapidly inland towards the Chase.

It was tea time when she came in, and she found her husband and mother in the hall room, in what appeared to have been an excited discussion. Both faces were flushed ; Lurgan had

his hands in his pockets, and was standing sulkily before the fire. He had just come in from the golf links, and Alice thought with distaste that he did not look quite like a gentleman in his rough clothes. His hair was too flat upon his head, and his eyes too near together.

For the first time since she had been his wife he did not greet her pleasantly, but merely gave her a gruff word and a nod. The whole atmosphere was one of suspended thunder. Alice sat down by the tea table with a depressed air. A family quarrel seemed such a dreadful thing to her. It was something in which she would not dare to take a wife's part. The dowager Lady Lurgan was still mistress of this house. But she might try to disperse the clouds.

"I am frightfully hungry after my trot," she said. "I do not believe I am ever going to really enjoy a trotting horse. I was taught to ride on a galloping Mexican pony."

Lady Lurgan suddenly took up the tea pot.

"My dear," she said, in a tone that was dry and hard, "this tea is perfectly cold, and as you are so tired and hungry, I will have a little luncheon and some hot tea sent up to your own room. I am sure you want to get out of that uncomfortable habit."

And hardly knowing how it had happened, Alice found herself going up the stairs like a

child that had been sent out of the way in order that the elders might talk without the embarrassment of its presence. She heard the echoes of the quarrel before she passed out of hearing.

"I tell you I won't have that meddlesome old idiot on the place," Lurgan was saying vehemently. "My affairs are my own. What right has he here?"

"No particular right, except that he has saved you from destruction more than once already, and that he is still heir presumptive to this title and estate."

But the quarrels of even her husband and his mother did not disturb Alice for long. She thought of her day, and of her new acquaintance. She decided that Mrs. Welles was a good deal like an American woman, with less constraint in one way, and not so great a lack of it in others, as some of the English women. She was glad to know her.

Alice dressed leisurely, and did not go down until almost dinner time. She found her husband's mother already in the drawing room. The dowager was generally the first of the family down stairs, and had a neat little pile of books upon the sociological questions which the various physicians of the world's morals and manners attempt to solve. But she was reading none of

these now. As Alice came in, she arose, and walked the length of the room and back again. She was a domineering and a rather tactless woman, and she had something to say.

"Alice," she said, "I hear that you met a woman, a Mrs. Welles, in one of the farm houses today. I must ask you never to speak to her or recognize her in any way again."

The tone brought a flush to the face of her daughter in law, and into her eyes a look which Lady Lurgan had never seen there before. After a second's pause, the girl asked, "Why?"

"She is not of our class at all. She does not belong here. She is not recognized."

"Pardon me, Lady Lurgan," Alice said, "but I cannot consider that a reason for not speaking to Mrs. Welles. I saw her today, kind hearted, generous, ready to help in an emergency. She may not belong to your social class, but I have known a great many people who did not. I certainly should not refuse to recognize them upon that account."

"She is a woman with a past—with a bad character."

"Yet I understand that Mrs. Bingham, the rector's wife, visits her and goes about with her."

"Mrs. Bingham——" Lady Lurgan laughed. "Mrs. Bingham is half saint and half fool. She never believes anything she does not see."

"I am neither one nor the other," Alice said, "but I believe I am a little obstinate. I shall continue to speak to Mrs. Welles when I meet her, and I shall not avoid her."

"If you do," Lady Lurgan returned, with something like fury, "you will make a scandal in this county."

She caught her own words, but Alice had risen to her feet, her face white.

"Lady Lurgan, what do you mean?" she demanded.

But her husband's mother had control of herself. "Only that they will say that we have allowed you to make acquaintances you should never have made."

"Speaking to this woman, however bad she may once have been, cannot hurt me. She is evidently repentant."

"Repentant!" Lady Lurgan flung the word out with scorn. "Repentant! She? She amuses herself! She is here to annoy us."

"What is she to *us*?" There was pride in Alice's voice.

"Nothing! She shall not become so by making you speak to her. You must not."

"I shall ask my husband to tell me why before I answer you," Alice said.

XII.

Alice went up stairs with her mind astir with that vague jealousy which has nothing whatever to do with affection. It was merely her sense of dignity that was irritated ; but perhaps the sensation was all the stronger. All the social philosophers and sages to the contrary, it is not the people who are "in love" with each other who are jealous. Their minds are filled up. They have the confidence that comes of perfect understanding. It is the woman who sees herself in danger of losing something she once owned who is jealous.

"To annoy us," she said over to herself. "A woman with a past—a bad character ;" and her cheeks flamed. She was young, and almost abnormally innocent, but there were some things she quite comprehended. A wave of disgust and dislike swept across her at the thought of her husband, and then that, too, left its reaction, and she wondered if she were quite doing him justice. She really knew nothing ; almost intuitively, and not at all according to facts, she was taking a black view of the man she had married.

As she developed from the care free girl of a few months ago into the woman who felt burdens upon her shoulders, Alice had found herself in possession of that dominating composite American conscience which belongs particularly to the women of the mixed blood of her native land. Her husband, she decided, was the one to tell her this story. Then she felt the prick of that unsleeping monitor. Wasn't she asking him because she doubted him? Her thought ran swifter than her control. If it had been Chris, would she have asked him? Wouldn't she have considered it an insult?

"It would have been, because anything dishonorable would have been untrue!" She answered herself aloud, and then hid her face in shame. Would she never get this life away from the old one? "I will ask him," she said obstinately. "I will ask him, because it is my right to know what his mother meant."

No opportunity came, however, that evening. Life in a great house like Salby Chase had many conventionalities, and Alice found herself carried along in their grasp. A neighbor or two came in to dine, and as Alice entered the drawing room for the second time, she encountered, at the door, a tall, broad shouldered young man with sleek, thick brown hair parted very much on one side, and with everything about him sug-

gesting blunt strength and strong individuality. He looked at her with the frankest interest, and bowing, held open the door for her to pass in. Lurgan, who was talking to Sir Thomas Creighton at the fireplace, vouchsafed the young man a nod as he entered, and did not stir ; but Captain Innis walked leisurely forward, gave him a limp hand, and murmured his name to Alice, as she passed forward. It sounded to her like Weldon, and supposing its owner to be another of the young men of the neighborhood, or perhaps a relative, she gave him her hand, a pleasant word or two, and walked on to go out to dinner with Sir Thomas. But she presently found that the stranger was beside her at dinner.

The head of the table had never been given to her, nor had she desired it. Lady Lurgan still sat there as mistress of the house.

Sir Thomas was one of the men who mutely beg not to be disturbed at their dinners. Captain Innis, his nephew, and an old squire, who was the third guest, were soon deep in an animated discussion, while the elder Lady Lurgan sat in gloomy silence, full of a disapproval which Alice supposed was directed toward her. It had the simple effect of tightening her lips, adding a color to her face, and bringing a hot indignation to her heart. She was so much occupied with these things that she hardly gave a moment's

thought to the young man beside her until he spoke.

"I believe, Lady Lurgan," he said, "that we have met before."

"Yes?" she said indifferently. She had met a great many Englishmen, young and old, in the past six months, and they had made generally a short impression on her.

"In Chicago."

Alice gave a start which was almost a jump, and a wave of crimson ran over her face.

"Chicago?"

"Yes, last year. Your father had me out to build his picture gallery, and see that it was properly lighted and all that. You have probably forgotten me."

"Oh, you are Mr. Belding. Of course—I remember." She was so glad to hear of her home, to see some one who knew it, that she was on the point of putting out her hand to shake his, but an expression which she saw in the face of her husband's mother killed the impulse. "And how came you here?" Then, realizing that it was her house in name, she grew suddenly embarrassed. "I mean, it is a surprise to see you here."

"Is it? I have been flattering myself I was here because you remembered me, and thought that picture gallery such a good piece of work."

"We did think it quite wonderful, and so did every one in Chicago," she said a little vaguely, but he went on.

"I am rather disappointed. When you wrote me and told me to come down here and look the field over, and see what must be done about the wings, I naturally supposed that I was keeping an old customer, as the shopkeepers say."

"I suppose it was your fame generally," Alice said lightly, but a proud pang went through her heart. They were going to build wings to the house; she put resolutely away from herself the consciousness that it would be done with her money, and that she had to hear the story from the architect merely by chance.

"What is your idea for this style of house, Lady Lurgan?—if I may talk shop for a moment. I had a photograph and a plan of the house before I came down, and have drawn something that I think will be rather good, to submit to you."

"I have formed no ideas upon the subject," Alice said bravely. "I shall be very glad to see your designs. Were you in Chicago long?"

"Two months. I was at my uncle's New York house when I was called out to attend to the picture gallery. I intend to go over to New York every year. I felt as if England was particularly fortunate when I heard that you

were to marry Lord Lurgan. Your father and mother were good enough to send me cards to your wedding. And what has become of that splendid young foster brother of yours—wasn't he—Mr. Batterman?"

But Alice was fortunately saved the answering of that question by the dowager, who came in promptly and monopolized the conversation for the rest of the dinner.

When they went into the drawing room again Lady Lurgan walked directly toward the little table where her books were piled, and sat down to them without a word. There was a disagreeable expression on her face, one that aroused all the unpleasant traits of Alice's usually pleasant nature.

She walked through the long rooms once or twice, and sat down near a corner where the hot water pipes were hidden from view by a screen of carving and heavy gilding.

"You will find no heat there," Lady Lurgan said. "I gave orders this morning that the pipes were not to be heated again. The house has been like an oven lately. The open fire is quite sufficient to dry the air."

"I understand from Mr. Belding that you are contemplating the addition of wings to the house," Alice replied. There was not a trace of sarcasm in her voice, but Lady Lurgan looked at

her suspiciously. "I did not tell him that the letter he received from you was not from me."

"It is an addition we have contemplated for a long time," the elder lady said very coolly. "Since you have spoken of Belding, I may as well mention that we are not in the habit of making friends of our workmen. He is a man of respectable manners and birth, but not at all one of us. I noticed that Sir Thomas looked at your effusion over him with some amazement this evening, particularly when he said that he had been invited to your wedding. It gives an erroneous idea of your position in America."

The last words were spoken with something of an apologetic tone, for Alice had risen to her feet. Her impulse was to say, "You are the most disagreeable and insolent old lady I ever met, and I refuse to speak to you for another moment." Fortunately her good sense came to the rescue, and although her breath came swiftly, she sat down.

"Perhaps, Lady Lurgan," she said, "you have an erroneous idea concerning my position—both in America and here. We had for our friends there such people as we cared to know."

"I am sure I am glad to hear that. Mrs. Leigh-Maynard, of New York, gave me a little different idea," Lady Lurgan said with great suavity. "She gave me to understand that you

wanted to know a great many people who were unknown to you. But it is needless to prolong this discussion, my dear. Your position now is that of your husband and of this family. You belong to us, and I am sure your good sense will tell you that you must be guided by the rules under which we live. Whenever you are in doubt, I shall be very glad to instruct you ; ” and Lady Lurgan took up her book.

Alice, fairly choking, rose and went to the window. She could see the terrace shining outside in the pleasant moonlight. The picture was so lovely that it soothed her for a moment, and calmed the hot resentment that was stirring every drop of her blood ; but she drew half a dozen long breaths. She was not a child to be browbeaten, and yet she felt like one. She felt that she should know exactly how to take her proper position with that old woman. She had begun all wrong. She should have taken the reins in the beginning, should have asserted herself. She turned once and looked back at her sitting there, calm, self possessed, not even elated over her victory. She was accustomed to victories.

Indeed, Lady Lurgan had no sense of victory. She felt such a contempt for her son's wife that she put her aside as she might put aside any other little necessary annoyance of her life. The sweeter and more docile the girl was, the less

she respected her. She looked upon her as a poor spirited foreigner, ready to give her fortune, her individuality, and herself for a title and a position in the world.

A sound at Alice's elbow made her turn with a smile of relief. It was good to hear a hearty young voice which was ready to speak of home.

"It looks pleasant out there, doesn't it?" Belding said. "That distant view of the sea might be Lake Michigan. I wonder if you Americans who come over here are ever homesick. I beg your pardon, Lady Lurgan," he added in a low tone. "I might have known that—oh, please do not. Forgive me!" Alice had given a little sob that was not much more than a sigh, but it had touched the young man with an electrical thrill of understanding which made him see in an instant how much his words had meant to her.

"Never mind," she said. "Let us go out for a moment."

To do Alice justice, she had quite forgotten that Lady Lurgan had just asked her not to make a friend of this young man. She forgot everything except that she must not let her mother in law or the rest see her cry.

Belding softly opened the window, and Lady Lurgan looked up to see the two young people walking down the terrace in the moonlight.

XIII.

BUT if Alice went out to hide her tears, she was far from successful. She had not cried, really cried, for months, and the pent up emotion was like one of those floods which require only a slight loosening of the wall before them to sweep away every barrier and spend themselves. In a moment after reaching the terrace she found that she must weep, that she was powerless to control herself, and she remembered the little door that led into the library from the garden. She could not stand here with this strange young man, however sympathetic he might be. She must get to her own room.

Bewildered, full of sympathy, he walked beside her, dumb, wondering.

"There is a door," she managed to tell him, "on the other side of the house. Let us go there."

They walked rapidly along in the sweet white night. The air was full of the thrill of spring, but the fresh smell of the grass, the incoming tide of life that was thrilling the earth, was but a new cause for emotion in Alice. It seemed as

if the earth was the one familiar thing, and she longed to throw herself upon it and ease her heart. All the time she was filled with a horrible embarrassment. She knew instinctively that this young man would not betray her, but she could not let her husband or her husband's mother know of her breakdown.

When they reached the door, she slipped in, and turned to Belding.

"I will be back in a moment. Wait for me here."

"Yes—come back. I am so sorry," he said. "You will find me here. I will walk along this piece of shrubbery."

Lady Lurgan, the elder, sat bolt upright in her chair, the latest of the unpleasant books open before her, but not an argument or a line found comprehension in her brain. She was thinking what she should say to her son when he came in. She would not hasten him at all. In fact, she rather hoped that he would be a little late in coming in from the dining room. Then her opportunity to say unpleasant things might be strengthened.

But even Lady Lurgan grew uneasy before the men came in. She went once to the window and looked out. There was no one in sight. The terrace was empty. It was almost an hour before Lurgan, his uncle, and the two neighbors

came in. They had gone into the harness room and looked at some new illustrations of their host's theories upon various equipments for the hunting field, and the time had slipped away rapidly. When it is only a man's wife and mother who are waiting for him, he can usually find excuses for not hastening—at least when he happens to be of Lurgan's type.

When he loafed in at last, in a capital good humor, he looked about for Alice, and asked for her.

"She has been on the terrace with your architect for the past hour," his mother said calmly.

"Oh, I suppose Belding is telling her where he is going to put on his additions," he said easily. To him Alice was a certainty. He saw no particular harm in her going out on the terrace if she wished.

"She has nothing around her, and I think it would be just as well if you brought her in," Lady Lurgan said, in a tone quite as indifferent as his own, but with a cool quality which made her son look at her with something like anger. They had had a discussion during the afternoon, in which the son had had the one refuge of disrespect and impertinence. Even with those weapons he felt that he had come off worsted, and he was angry with both his mother and himself. It did not suit him to be angry. It ruffled

and annoyed him. Long experience had taught him that in the long run it did not pay to vex his mother.

"Give me a wrap or something and I will go after her," he said.

But it was not an easy matter to find her. Up and down the terrace and the grounds he went, without seeing a sign of his wife. Once he felt sure he must have missed her, and went back, but his mother's triumphant face sent him out again into the moonlight with a muttered imprecation.

"The Americans have a little different manners from ours," he heard her explaining to old Sir Thomas, whose red face was seen in the center of every collection of gossip talkers in the county.

This time the red gleam of Belding's cigar drew him to the shrubbery by the library, and he crashed down the gravel toward the young architect, to find him alone.

"Where is Lady Lurgan?" the earl asked without the least preliminary.

"Lady Lurgan?" Belding was a young man of good heart and ardent sympathies, but he had not a very ready tact. "Lady Lurgan left me a moment ago, to go to her apartment, I believe, perhaps for a wrap"—seeing the scarf on Lurgan's arm. "I told her I would wait for her."

"Thank you very much, but I will relieve

you of the duty. I want to speak to my wife for a moment."

Lurgan went through the door, and left Belding with his cigar, feeling that he had made a mess of it somewhere. Angry, and not at all of the disposition to conceal it, he ran up stairs, and with a hurried knock, to which he waited for no answer, went into his wife's dressing room. Alice, her face swollen with weeping, was standing by her dressing table, trying to cover up the traces of tears with powder and making a sorry spectacle of herself.

The sight exasperated Lurgan to the point of rudeness. She looked plain, and she displeased him.

"May I ask," he said cuttingly, "if I must remonstrate with my architect for causing you this discomfort?"

Three hours before Alice might have kept silent, but she had wept all her tears away, and was beginning to think she had been a fool for ever having cried at all.

"My discomfort was not caused by any guest in this house, but by an accumulation of unpleasant things," she said spiritedly, although her voice caught now and then like a child's when it has cried itself to exhaustion. She turned squarely and looked at her husband, and their eyes met without one ray of under-

standing or sympathy. They were strangers to each other, and they realized it with distaste. "It began early in the evening," Alice went on calmly, "speaking of my discomfort today. I met a—woman in one of the cottages today, a Mrs. Welles. The fact that I had spoken to her appeared to be a sufficiently important piece of news to be carried directly to your mother, who told me that she was a woman with a past ; that it would be a scandal if I recognized her ; that she was here to annoy *us*. Will you be good enough to explain the situation to me?"

Lurgan smiled in what he intended to be a cynical, indifferent, man of the world fashion, but to save his life some element of self complacency could not be kept out.

"And you do me the honor to be jealous," he said.

Alice started as if she had been stung.

"Jealous ! I ? Of a woman I must be warned not to speak to ? You have answered my question. Understand, Lord Lurgan, that——" Her face grew white, she looked at him for another instant, and walked to the door of her bed room. Then she came back, and said with a calmness which so exasperated him that he wanted to strike her, "I must ask you to leave the room."

"Alice," he said, "this is infernal nonsense ! I will not have my home broken up by dissen-

sions. You are my wife. Suppose I have done a few wild things in my early youth, you did not expect me to be like one of your Christian Association young men, did you? You yourself, tonight, have set the county talking by spending the evening on the terrace with a man who is——”

“Will you be good enough to leave my room?”

“If you put it in that fashion, certainly;” and he went out and gave himself the pleasure of drawing the door softly to its latch, when he might have slammed it, to show how very calm he was.

Alice's night was miserable. She went over all the arguments which a kind and charitable world has provided for cases like this, and her vivid imagination roamed from a “past” for her husband to the blackest present. As soon as it was early morning, she arose and went out into the beautiful, dewy park. She wondered if she ought to go away. She wondered how much certainty a woman needed before she went away. She would write to her father—but how could she? No, she would settle it for herself. She did not know how much money she had, but she had always heard that it was a great deal, and now she was glad of it. She made a picture in her mind of going to some quiet place, and living alone, working among the poor, doing

good, living her own simple life, until the thought of her stepmother came across the horizon.

They were coming abroad for the summer, to have a house and go about during the London season. She could not disappoint them. She was still under the thrall of Mrs. Sanderson's ambition, and she could not get away from it. She drew a long breath. It might be different when her father and mother came. It *must* be different. Her mother could settle everything. She supposed that life could go on, outwardly, in conventional fashion.

She had stopped by the side of an old marble basin, and mechanically stooped to call the gold fish, when she saw a shadow on the water and looked up to see Captain Innis walking toward her. He had been away from the Chase, more or less, ever since her arrival, and she had not grown past first acquaintance with him. There was nothing in Alice's nature which attracted him, or in his to make her look to him for sympathy at any time. It was with the greatest distaste that she arose to her feet upon his approach, and she would have moved away with a nod of good morning. But Captain Innis stopped her. He wore all the courtly airs that were esteemed the rightful possession of one of his house upon all occasions of ceremony, and he was grave to solemnity.

"My dear Lady Lurgan," he said, and Alice could feel the theatrical premonitions in his tone, "I must beg your pardon for what you may rightly consider an impertinence."

Alice waited with an expression of face which certainly did not invite an impertinence, but Captain Innis went on quite undaunted.

"You must understand that my nephew has always been to me like a son. I have had to take a father's place toward him ever since he was a boy, and when I see him in grief I have something of the right to ask for an explanation."

He looked sidewise at Alice, at the mention of grief, to see how it affected her. Captain Innis' eyes were long and black and narrow, and the sidelong expression was easy to them; but when he caught the straightforward gaze in Alice's eyes, he turned his quickly and went on.

"This morning I learned, partly from my nephew and partly from his mother, that you had taken a wrong view of a lady who lives in the neighborhood." Captain Innis paused, and an expression that somewhat resembled a look of pain passed over his face. "I can quite exonerate my nephew from any responsibility in bringing Mrs. Welles down here. In fact, she was not brought at all, but came—hear me out, I beg," as Alice made a motion toward the house. "Not because she felt that she had a claim upon

my nephew, but upon me. I beg your pardon sincerely for telling you the story. It is an old one, forgotten long ago by both of us. Mrs. Welles likes this neighborhood and stays here in her own house."

Captain Innis' tone was one of deep shame and contrition, but Alice had lost sight of him in the new and complex emotion that was taking possession of her. She had just heard, on the best authority, that she had judged her husband hastily and wrongfully, and that there was no necessity for the heroic treatment she had contemplated. She was not overcome with joy. That conscience of hers was standing in its particular pulpit, delivering its own homily, and inviting her to undo processes of thought which she had quite accepted, telling her to go to Lurgan and beg his pardon; and all the while the obstinate side of her was saying that he had been insulting to her, that this was only one of many things. The little god was not there with his rosy glasses to make all things beautiful in this new light, and Alice was not sure that she had not been welcoming an excuse to get away from the trials of her life. They seemed too heavy to bear.

But what she must do was quite plain before her. She knew that Lurgan would not be out for two or three hours, and she went up and

sent a message to him, asking him to come to her sitting room as soon as he arose ; and then she sat down to look over the letters from home, and to answer them. Here at least were some people whom it was in her power to please. Her step-mother asked that an agent be consulted about finding a house quite near the London house of the Lurgans, and that it be large, and designed for entertaining.

“ Get a duke’s house, if you can,” she wrote ; “ they say that the prestige of a good house is everything. Of course we shall not need anything of that sort, but there is no reason for our lacking any of the advantages.”

Alice wrote that she had already spoken to Lady Fortescue, who told her that the dowager Lady Lurgan knew all about houses, and would be sure to select quite the proper thing.

She had hardly finished, and patted on the stamp, when Lurgan entered. He was in riding costume, and had an air about him which seemed to say that it would be an excellent idea to be as expeditious as possible. His complete ignoring of the semblance of a quarrel of the evening before put Alice out, and for an instant she stood speechless. To a man who loved her there would have been something sweetly pathetic in her slender girlish figure and pale face, but Lurgan looked at her coldly.

Half an hour earlier his uncle had come into his room and told him what he had done.

"I have only one thing to say," Lurgan had said, as he drew the razor down his thin, dark cheek, "and that is that you have made a meddlesome ass of yourself."

"I believe she would have left you."

"Not at all. You don't know the influences on the other side of the world. And beside, where would she go? She is not likely to give up social life, just when she is entering upon it, for a whim. Oh, no, Alfred, the American woman does not marry over here for the purpose of getting a Chicago divorce. It was just as well to let her gradually accustom herself to the idea that she has not married a saint, nor a man who makes any pretense of being a saint. They all have to learn that lesson sooner or later, and you have done neither of us any sort of a kindness in postponing it."

"You do not understand the sort of woman you have married."

"I understand that she is a woman, and she is my wife," Lurgan said grimly. "She must put up with the situation. I know she married me for my position, because she was in love with another man when she did it. A woman who can do that can put up with a few peccadilloes."

"If that young girl you have married is a cool,

calculating woman of purely commercial instincts, I must revise my study of the sex," Alfred Innis said.

"You may as well begin, then," his nephew rejoined. "She is a cool hand. Sometimes she almost deceives me. I believe she has an idea of doing her duty by me, or something of that sort. She is pretty young, and innocent in most ways, but she married me to gain the title and the position."

This was the belief in his heart as he stood and looked at her. To Lurgan's mind, as to that of a great many other men, women are all sly, and what they call "up to tricks." They expect them to be ready to play upon the feelings. A really honest woman is something they quite fail to understand.

"I sent for you," Alice said, "to tell you how sorry and ashamed I am for having spoken to you of my unpleasant suspicions. I know what an injustice I did you. I beg your pardon."

Lurgan walked over to her, kissed her lightly on the forehead and laughed. "I thought you would learn, by and by, not to let imagination make you see too many things. It isn't pleasant for anybody."

"Of course I shall never speak to that Mrs. Welles again. She ought not to be here. Why didn't your uncle marry her?"

Lurgan's brows drew together in a hard, black line, and his mouth twitched disagreeably.

"Oh, cut that, Alice," he said. "Let the poor woman alone. The world is surely big enough for the two of you without ever crossing each other. She wouldn't have looked at Alfred."

"But I thought——"

"Don't think."

"I am sure I shall be glad not to think about disagreeable things. Where are you going?"

"Down to the home farm, and for a gallop. Good by. I may go on over and lunch with Theo;" and he went out, leaving Alice unsatisfied, and with an uneasy sensation that after all this was not a pleasant family to belong to.

The thought of having her own family in London was an unspeakable relief. She wanted Connie's gay laughter, her father's handsome face, and—blessed thought!—her stepmother's talent for straightening out tangles. They were so pleasant, so smooth. Life had been so simple and easy at home.

XIV.

“IT isn’t exactly pleasant always to hear the truth, I will admit,” Lady Fortescue was saying, “but at any rate you know exactly where you stand. They tell me that in America you habitually say pleasant things to each other, whether they are true or not, just as the Japanese do, and when you come in contact with our habit of always saying what we mean, you find us blunt and rude. Is that true?”

“Sometimes,” Alice admitted, “we cut out a fact which might sound rude, but I think we are habitually honest. We simply do not tell *all* the truth.”

“Neither do we English, for that matter,” Lady Fortescue admitted; “and for my part I often say a thing simply because it is rude. I like to stir up the animals. You are always so complimentary, when you say anything at all, that I generally doubt you, although I confess I am touched by the compliment of anybody wanting to flatter me.”

Alice leaned back against the sofa, and smiled. They were being dined at the Fortescues’ enor-

mous house, which appeared to have a great many of the startling characteristics of its mistress, but Alice was learning to enjoy some of them. Now and then there was a flavor about Lady Fortescue and her belongings which recalled Chicago. Tonight she was entertaining a duke and duchess, and was giving one of those great dinner parties which are commoner in England than they are in America, and which possess, in houses of great and ostentatious wealth like this one, almost the importance of public functions. The duchess had taken a particular fancy to Alice, and as she was not only the owner of a very old and wealthy title, but a leader in the most conservative social world, as her husband was in the political, her notice was considered worth while. To Alice, she looked more like an ancient governess than anything else. Her face had the thin, haggard, and worried lines which are sometimes seen in the manager of a girls' boarding school. She was said to be kind hearted in some directions, but intensely practical, and taken up with many affairs. She had congratulated the elder Lady Lurgan upon having secured such a pretty wife with such a large fortune for her son, and then she let Alice sit beside her while she told her some of the advantages of being a countess.

"They tell me you have been able to put the

town house in order, and that you will go up for the season and entertain. Are you accustomed to large entertainments?" Then, without waiting for an answer, she went on: "Lady Lurgan will be able to coach you in our ways, however, and you will soon be able to carry on your duties properly."

"My mother will be with me a great deal of the time," Alice said.

Lady Lurgan sat within earshot, and Alice, who had thought of many things in the last week, saw that this might be a good opportunity for letting her mother in law know that she intended being mistress of the town house.

"Your mother is an American, is she not?"

"Yes. She intends taking a house in London. I am to see about it at once. She will probably entertain."

"They tell me a great many Americans are trying to make their way into society over here," her grace said, but with rather a lack of interest.

The dowager Lady Lurgan settled back into her chair with an expression which was not pleasant, but it contained no look of defeat. It was rather the smile of one whose patience had been pushed to extremities, and who would calmly and judicially mete out punishment. She had arrayed herself in the glory of a velvet gown, with some heavy old Venetian point lace, and a

rather barbaric display of jewelry, and she had something of the grim stateliness of a Roman emperor.

The evening had not been a very pleasant one to Alice. Wherever she went, she was conscious always of something like toleration. The women and men had evidently expected to find a very different person in the American heiress that Lurgan had married. They had heard that Americans were vivacious, high colored, and smartly gowned, with "snap" and wit and "go"; a little vulgar, perhaps, but quite able to take the reins in their own hands and do what they chose. Instead, they saw a very young, very gentle girl, who seemed to have little spirit, and to take no great amount of interest in life. They confessed that she was remarkably pretty, and very well dressed, but there were plenty of girls in English society who were both those things. The men said Lurgan had a wife vastly too good for him, and wondered at his luck, but moved respectfully away from a young woman who seemed to care very little about them. Their wives and daughters looked at her with an expressed wonder at the reputations Americans somehow managed to get for themselves. As Alice felt herself more and more an object of curiosity, she drew more and more within herself. Her very soul would have burned could she have known that Sir

Thomas Creighton had already told that she had gone out walking with the architect in the moonlight until her husband had been obliged to go after her. "Hunting an 'ice cream parlor,' I suppose," Sir Thomas had said, in deference to that poor old American joke of which the newspapers are so fond. Nor did she dream that the story of her meeting with Mrs. Welles had been laughed at, or received with exclamations of pity, in every house in the county.

The homeward drive was a long one, and the three occupants of the Chase carriage sat silent most of the way. Alice had nothing to say, and when Lurgan and his mother spoke it was concerning the additions that were to be made to the house during the summer. Alice's pride kept her apart from them. She used to have courage enough, she thought, and she made up her mind to settle the question of the town house. She would make a bold stroke; and then, her heart beating a little faster, she hesitated. It might be unpleasant. She would go and settle the matter with Lurgan, and let him make the arrangements. The possibility that he would not agree to anything she might suggest, if she really took it upon herself to take the initiative, never for one instant entered her mind. He was her husband, and this was her home. She had been indolent and stupid not to have said in the

beginning that she would take the charge of the house.

Alice's ideas of the relation between a husband and a wife were purely American. She had seen nothing in England to contradict her theories. Lady Fortescue did exactly as she chose in her own house, and the only difference in Salby Chase was that the mother had been left in control instead of the wife.

It was very late when the carriage drew up to the door. A fire was burning in the hall, and a man was there with a tray, while a jug of something was brewing on the hearth.

"Come here before you go up, Algernon," his mother said. "I want to speak to you. I shall probably not be down before you go to London in the morning."

Alice hesitated. "Are you going to London tomorrow? I—if you don't mind, I think I will go with you."

"I am only going up for the day, a very hasty trip, to see the lawyers," Lurgan said hurriedly, in reply.

"Oh, very well, but I think I will take Celeste and go up any way."

"New gowns? I thought you had enough to last for a century."

"No, I want to see the town house."

"That is all being prepared. You need give

yourself no concern about the town house," Lady Lurgan said quickly.

"And then," Alice went on, speaking indifferently, "I want to see if it is necessary for mamma to get a house in London. It seems to me that if ours is so large, there is no reason why papa and mamma and Constance should not stay with us."

Lurgan had taken the tongs in his hands and was carefully lifting up some pieces of wood and placing them on the logs, but his mother gave a short laugh.

"Sit down, Alice," she said with great good humor. "I had intended talking this matter of your people coming over here with Algernon tonight; but since you have brought up the subject, it may as well be finished now. Of course, the idea of entertaining them in our house is preposterous."

Alice had grown very pale, but she faced Lady Lurgan unflinchingly.

"Pardon me, Lady Lurgan," she said, "but I must be the judge of when I shall entertain my family in my own house."

"In your husband's house, you mean. This is your first season in London. You are under the disadvantage of being a foreigner, of no birth, with no family connections whatever. You have married into this family, and it is its duty, and shall be its care, to see that you make no serious

mistakes. You could do nothing so fatal—so absolutely ludicrous—as to take a lot of nobodies into your house to foist upon the friends of your husband's family. We cannot allow it. Not only shall we not invite Mr. and Mrs. Sanderson and their daughter to visit us just now, but if they persist in coming to London, I shall write to your parents and tell them what a disadvantage their presence would be to you, and shall ask them to remain in America." Lady Lurgan's voice was perfectly calm and suave. "And after the trouble they have taken to place you in a good position, I believe that when they understand the situation they will be the last people to imperil it."

"I cannot take your decision, cannot allow you to make one for me, Lady Lurgan," Alice said.

"My son quite agrees with me, I am sure."

Lurgan straightened up, and looked bored. "Of course it is all nonsense for you to quarrel, but Alice, you must be sensible, and see that mother is right."

XV.

SOME characters are firm in maturity, after they have gone through a sort of mellowing process, but deserve only the description of obstinacy in their youth.

Alice, Lady Lurgan, had one of these. She said nothing when her husband and her mother in law settled her affairs between them, but set her lips together and walked up stairs ; and the force of her new will was such that she not only did not cry, but she closed her eyes and went to sleep, first setting a tiny Dresden clock by her bedside. Her maid undressed her as usual, giving her the half careless attention which most American women allow when they are tired at night. As she started to leave the room, Alice called to her.

"Celeste," she said, "come in very early in the morning. I am going up to London during the day, and I shall want you to go with me."

"Do you go with Lord Lurgan, my lady?" It had taken Celeste only the time of the marriage ceremony to learn to give Alice the title which servants love.

"I am not sure. He thinks of going rather early, I believe."

"Yes, my lady. Mr. Merton, his man——"

"That will do. Go down to the offices in the morning and bring me a time table. And, Celeste, you need not speak of my going."

"No, my lady."

But how could a poor French girl, who knew nothing whatever of English, find a time table without assistance? Mr. Merton, called upon, gave all the information concerning London trains.

"I am going to stay at home myself," Mr. Merton volunteered. "I am like her ladyship—not wanted at all particularly. I tell you, Mlle. Celeste, if you want amusement, just take your mistress up by the 11.42. That's the train for her to go on."

"Is his lordship going up by that train?"

"Not he. He goes up by the 9.30 ; but you take my lady up on the eleven express."

"I think you are too much like your master, and I'll not run the risk of teasing the poor thing, so I'll not do it. And for that, you might tell me why you want it done."

Merton leaned over and whispered something which made Celeste draw back with her features distorted.

"You're a mean, disgusting fellow to want to

destroy a poor lady's happiness ; and you have come to the wrong person to help you. It is not I that would hurt her in any way. However we get to London, it will not be on that train."

"I hope she catches him at his tricks, all the same," Merton said spitefully. "I should like to see what he would do then. She looks almighty meek, but I'll wager half a crown she wouldn't be an easy one to let up. Perhaps she's got an inkling and is going up to pry about a bit, eh?"

"You don't know her," Celeste said with pride, and walked out. But before she reached Alice's room she had gone over the time table, and when she set down the breakfast tray she had brought in, she folded the card of the trains so that the 11.42 express was prominent.

Alice looked the train list over, and said, as she put it down :

"Order the brougham at eleven o'clock."

Celeste said nothing, but her excitement loving heart beat a little faster.

Alice left no message for Lady Lurgan. She felt that all communication had been broken off, except what was absolutely necessary. She did not even glance back as she took her seat, with Celeste by her side, in the brougham. It might be discourteous, but Alice was entering upon a period, she told herself, where discourtesy was

going to count for little—at least, such discourtesy as this.

The station at Salby was a small one, with a gay little house and a long, sunny platform. As Lady Lurgan's carriage drew up, a pony chaise drove away, leaving a lady in a fresh spring gown standing alone in the full light. As Alice stepped out she recognized her as Mrs. Welles. Her first impulse was to bow, although she could feel the red in her cheeks and brow; but the older woman looked her calmly and squarely in the face, and made no sign of recognition whatever.

When the train came along, Alice and her maid went into one compartment and Mrs. Welles into another. But the encounter had taken all of the life out of Alice's morning. She felt that she had been gauche—that she had not known how to treat a situation. And then she would not have been a modern American girl if some other thoughts had not crept into her mind.

She had not cut the acquaintance of Captain Innis. To be sure, she looked at him with a sort of disgust. He offended her, but she still spoke to him. He was not even kind hearted, and tender, and charitable, and she had discovered that this woman was all of those things. She told herself that she believed in one law for men

and for women, yet here she was, shrinking back, flushing at the sight of this woman with that vague thing they call a "past"—a period of life concerning which she was, as a matter of fact, absolutely ignorant—while every day she sat down with Captain Innis, who had confessed himself as the major cause of Mrs. Welles' disrepute, and treated him as a member of her family.

The country they were passing through was beautiful. Great houses could sometimes be seen back on wooded slopes. They went past picturesque little villages and sunken lanes where children in the dim, sweet colors which Birket Foster painted stood waiting for the train to go by. It was all full of the sweet suggestions of homes, and the Countess of Lurgan felt homeless.

She hardly knew where she was going when she reached London, but she knew very well what she intended to accomplish before she left it. Presently the green fields and the villages were left behind, and she was in the brick and mortar wilderness. Celeste was gathering up their wraps and bags. The French girl was so nervous that she was almost in tears, and she fumbled over her straps, and some magazines which they had brought, long after the train had come to a standstill. It was so long that the guard came to the door to help them out.

"In one moment, my lady," the girl said. She had taken half a dozen furtive looks out of the window. She had wondered what her mistress would do if—and now she feared above all things that she was about to discover. But they could not hesitate all day ; and at last they walked out to see Lord Lurgan putting Mrs. Welles into a cab, to see him follow her, and call a direction to the driver, and drive rapidly away.

Alice had not been trained in a school which would make her self possessed under a circumstance like this ; but nature came to her assistance. Hardly knowing what she did, numb, almost dizzy, she followed Celeste, who on the instant, and out of her own nervousness, had taken the initiative, to a cab. It was only when the maid asked her the direction that she realized that somewhere in her brain she had lost all of her plans for the day. She sat stupidly looking at Celeste for a moment, and then she went into the tiny silver mounted bag at her waist and brought out one of Belding's cards.

"Go there," she said.

She wanted to put her hands to her head and think of what she had seen. These people were all deceivers. They had laughed at her. They thought her a fool. She was simply the purse for this family. And then her sense of justice—Alice's greatest characteristic, after her

impulsiveness—came in again. She had no right to judge from purely circumstantial evidence. She wanted to think the least humiliating thing. She could not believe, all in an instant, that her husband was deceiving her in this bold way. She thought of all the instances where people had been condemned unjustly through a chain of circumstances. Captain Innis had told her that her husband had no connection with Mrs. Welles, and had taken that entanglement upon his own shoulders. It might be that Lurgan had brought the woman up to London to get her away from Salby, that she might no longer be a scandal there. Alice had read—in stories—of members of families making such arrangements. She would give Lurgan the benefit of the doubt, she said to herself; but even while she said it, the picture of his face as he stepped into that cab was before her. It was gay—not at all the face of a man performing a duty.

Celeste broke in upon her thoughts.

“Pardon me, my lady,” she said, “but are we going to a hotel anywhere?”

“Oh, yes, I suppose we must, some time—but first I want to go to the address the driver has. I have some business.”

“Oh,” Celeste said. She had seen the card, and was dying with curiosity; for the story of Lady Lurgan’s evening in the park with Mr.

Belding had come back to the servants' room at Salby Chase after it had reached the below stairs society of the other houses in the neighborhood. Celeste knew her mistress, she had thought, but since she reached England she was gaining new points of view. There are no such romancers as servants, and they can give to their masters and mistresses only such motives as they themselves possess.

Mr. Belding happened to be in his office. It was in a new building rather after the American plan, and as Alice went up in the "lift" she seemed to have touched Chicago remotely. She had no idea what Belding might think of her. She only knew that she had no plans, that there was something she must do, and that in all this great world of London, of England, here was the only human being to whom she felt like going.

Belding, thinking it was something about the new wings of Salby Chase, when he saw the card, came out of his work room rather stiffly. There had been a vagueness concerning his commission which had touched his pride; but when he saw Alice's white face, with its appealing eyes—eyes that held an expression of which she was quite unconscious—he was ready to do anything she asked, even to building the wings with his own hands.

But it was on quite a different errand she had come.

"Mr. Belding," she said, as she held out her hand to him, "I am commissioned by my father and mother to find a large house for them for the London season, and as you know them, and what they would be likely to want, I came to ask you to help me."

"Ah," Belding said, "I shall be delighted to be of any service to you, Lady Lurgan, but——"

"But what?"

"It is a little late in the season to pick up anything really desirable, unless it is so very desirable that it has not been put upon the market. I think, though, that perhaps that is exactly what Mrs. Sanderson would want."

"She wants the most desirable house in London."

"Would it not——" Belding hesitated. "Would it not be a good idea to consult the Lurgan family solicitor? He would probably know of all the good places to rent."

Alice's face flushed.

"I do not know who he is."

"Of course you would not," the young man said hastily. "Why should you? Perhaps it would not be the thing, after all. I know an agent who has innumerable houses. He will probably have exactly what you want."

"Come with me, then, please," Alice said. She was in a feverish hurry to get this done, so that it could not be undone. She could not let anybody disturb the plans of her family, and they might find some way to thwart her if she waited.

"It is luncheon time, and——" Belding looked at the wraps and bags the maid carried.

"We have not been to a hotel yet. Will you come with me, then, and lunch with me, and then we can go to the agent's at once?"

"I will call for you, or meet you at the agent's," Belding suggested.

"I shall insist upon your calling for me if you will be so good," Alice said. "I am in a great hurry. Would it not be possible to go now?"

"Certainly."

"I will send Celeste to the hotel and let her engage rooms for me, I think," Alice said, as they came out of the building.

"Very well," Belding replied. Lady Lurgan ought to know her own business best. She was an American, and she was the Countess of Lurgan. The agent was not far away, and they were lost in London, he thought, as he followed her into the cab, after sending the maid away in another.

They found the agent's chief deputy on duty, with plenty of houses to rent, and a laudable desire to tell them how much business his house was doing.

"I think," Belding had said, "that it will hardly be wise to say in the beginning that the house is for wealthy Americans, or that you are the Countess of Lurgan. The price will double itself immediately in that case. Let me do the bargaining, and you can tell me when you find what you want."

"Here," the agent said, "is the plan of a house which I let not a half an hour ago to the Earl of Lurgan. He was renting it for a relative."

Alice's heart bounded, while Belding looked at her curiously. Of course, she might have known that he would repent, and now he meant to surprise her.

"It is a small house, very small, but I understand it's for a cousin to live alone in, and it certainly is a little gem. We have never had anything more complete on our list. It belongs to a gentleman who has gone to Africa to shoot big game, they say, and his lordship got a bargain."

But Alice didn't hear anything more.

"I think," she said, "Mr. Belding, that I will ask you to take me to the hotel now. You know what my mother will want. Or—I am not sure that I want anything just now." Then, recovering herself: "Yes, I do. I want a house for them taken at once."

"I will come back and see the plans," Belding

said, and he took Lady Lurgan out and put her in the cab. He did not understand, but evidently she did.

"I will leave him!" Alice was saying to herself. "I do not care what happens. I will leave these dreadful people. I will see Lord Lurgan at once, and tell him so. I will write to my father."

Her mind went quickly back again to the vision she had had before, of taking her money and going away to some quiet place, and living as she liked. She couldn't go back to Chicago. Her father had given her a great deal of money upon her marriage, she knew. She could make plans, for it was only her pride and not her heart which had been hurt and insulted. Her life was wrecked, but she could think of recuperation. Perhaps she would not have been human had she not thought of Lady Lurgan's dismay when the money was taken away again.

She did not speak a word to Belding all the way to the hotel, and he, respecting her silence, looked out at the hurrying crowds, and tried not to wonder what it was all about. When they drove up to the hotel he sprang out and gave Lady Lurgan his hand, just as her husband came leisurely down the steps.

XVI.

IT is barely possible that Lurgan would have gone on if he had not met the eyes of his wife. He was astonished and angry, but he wanted a minute to consider exactly how he should express his disapproval of what he considered rank rebellion. She must be made to see what she was doing, how she was outraging the proprieties; and in the thought, he congratulated himself that he had left Mrs. Welles upstairs. Belding was quite harmless—of that he felt sure; and he thought of Alice only as a simpleton—all the more so, that she had put herself into his hands in this fashion.

He walked to his wife's side with an attitude of grave disapproval upon which even his mother could not have improved, and took Alice from Belding's care. But the woman who looked into his face had something in her own which met his. As he stopped to insist upon paying the cabman, Alice walked by him into the hotel, and when he reached her side again it was at the door of the rooms which Celeste had engaged for her. She stopped, her hand on the knob of

the door, and looked at him with polite questioning.

"I am coming in," Lurgan said. "I want to speak to you."

"Very well," she answered, and led the way into a sitting room, where Celeste stood waiting. "You may go," she said to the maid, and watched her until she had closed the door behind her. Then she turned to her husband.

"I want to see you, too, upon a matter of great importance to both of us."

"I shall be very glad to listen to anything you have to say," Lurgan said.

"I can say it in a few words. I am going to leave your house."

"Is this the time that a Chicago woman allows for a first marriage?" Lurgan sneered, and then had the perception to see what a mistake he had made. Alice's face was white, but it grew firmer. There was no sign of weakness in it now. "If it is not that, what has brought you to this decision?"

"The fact that we are perfectly uncongenial, for one thing, and could never be happy together; and for another, your disrespect to me as your wife."

"May I ask you to particularize?"

"Certainly. This morning, as I left the train, I saw you driving away in a cab"—Lurgan

made a gesture of derision, but Alice, her eyes on his, went calmly on—"with a woman whom your mother and your uncle had both told me was an improper person for me to speak to."

"There may be one rule for a man and another for a woman, I hope you will allow."

"In some cases, but not in this one."

"If you expect me to make an explanation of every detail of my life to you, you are expecting an impossibility."

"I expect every detail of your life to be such that it requires no explanation."

"And because I ride in a cab across London with a lady who lives in my neighborhood, my wife is about to leave me."

"We went to the office of a house agent, and were told that you had just rented a house for a lady."

"Oh, this is insufferable!" Lurgan exclaimed.

"You, my wife, know that I am coming to London, and you follow by the next train to spy upon me! You get one of my workmen to assist you in hounding my footsteps! Would it not have been in better taste to have employed a private detective? At least he would not have gone about gossiping of your folly."

"You know perfectly well that I was not following you. I came up to London upon business of my own."

" May I ask what? "

" I do not choose to tell you. "

" It appears to have been to call upon Belding in his chambers, I presume, sending your maid here out of the way, and then taking him to follow me. What are you two looking for? Grounds for a divorce? Did you make friends so quickly as that in the grounds at Salby Chase, or is he one of your old Chicago acquaintances? "

" You may insult me now, if you choose, " Alice said in a strained voice; " but it will not be for long. I am going to leave you. You are not a fit person for me to live with. "

" May I ask where you purpose going? "

" That I do not know. "

" To Chicago? "

" No ! No ! "

" I rather think not. Your parents would hardly receive you with great cordiality. You would not greatly augment the social position your stepmother desires to gain by any such conduct. "

" I do not want to go to Chicago. I will live quietly here, somewhere. I only ask that you give me the money I brought you, that my father gave me on my marriage, and let me go away. I ask nothing from you. "

Lurgan put one foot up on the seat of a low chair, before which he had been standing, and

calmly inspected his boot. Alice, who had eaten no breakfast and no luncheon, was faint for want of food and from nervous exhaustion, and sank down wearily upon the sofa.

"Your father gave you no money upon your marriage."

"That is untrue. I have heard everywhere that he gave me a large sum. I heard it discussed at home. My mother told me so."

"He gave me a large sum when I married you. You had a large dowry, but not one penny of it was settled upon you. I confess it surprised me at the time. I thought your father was a closer business man, but I fancy your mother did not want to antagonize me. She did not contemplate the possibility of your wishing to leave me."

"Then I have not a penny?"

"Not a penny of your own." Lurgan straightened himself up, and, having finished the inspection of his boot, put his hands in his pockets and rocked on his toes. "But I can assure you that you will always find me ready to give you such an allowance as you require."

"Then give me sufficient to go somewhere at once."

"I was about to say, so long as you are my wife and under my roof, I am hardly likely to give you an allowance to go away from me, to make a scandal, to destroy my home, to ruin your

prospects of future happiness and my own. That would hardly be common sense. I am ready to forgive your indiscretion, your horribly vulgar taste, if you will pardon my saying it, in following me to London and picking up Belding."

Alice rose to her feet.

"I do not think we need discuss this matter any further. You may go."

"Not for another moment or two, if you please," Lurgan returned, with great politeness. "We may as well settle this matter here and now. I am tired of this nonsense. I am not a school-boy to be followed about. I demand that you behave in a manner befitting your position. You do not seem to understand what that is, but I trust you will learn in time. My mother has kindly undertaken to tell you. This must be the last time that you make such a journey as this—that I absolutely forbid."

"You can forbid me to do nothing," Alice said. "I acknowledge your authority not at all. You have forfeited any claim you may have had upon my affections, and I am not your servant, to be ordered."

"No, but you are my wife."

"Not for another day! I will not return to your house."

"That I must ask you to do today," Lurgan said.

Alice did not reply, but she set her face with an expression which meant open revolt.

Lurgan started toward her once. He had always had a theory, which he had often put into practice, that any woman could be brought out of what he was pleased to term "a fit of the sulks" by a little judicious lightness and affection. But there was something in Alice's face which held him back from an attempt at this now. She looked obstinate, and he had a conviction that he did not know her; that here was a woman who was different from the women of his world. He would give her time to think, and Mrs. Welles was waiting for him. With a mutter about women who were always getting men into scrapes, Lurgan turned toward the door. After he had pulled it half open, he spoke to Alice.

"Are you coming home this evening?"

"I shall stay in London," she said in that expressionless voice which seemed to make him as remote as another century, "until I am able to secure a house for my mother, as she requested."

Again he hesitated, and then, with a "Good morning," he walked out.

Mrs. Welles received a hasty note, saying that Lord Lurgan had been suddenly called home.

"You Americans are so excitable," Lady Fortescue said the next morning, as she sat at the

breakfast table with Alice. "Here I am, routed out of my bed at daybreak, to come and tell you that Aunt Cecilia is a perfect old war horse, and that you will have to treat her with a little tact. Bear easy on the reins, my dear."

"You need not be trying to help me out with the fiction that I have anything to do with the driving at all," Alice said. "You must know that I am a perfect nobody in that house."

"Ah, but my dear, my dear," Theo remonstrated, "you surely think too highly of your marriage vows to leave your husband for any such trivial reason as that."

"You know it is not for that. You know!"

"I know what?"—innocently. "I assure you, my dear child, that I know nothing. I am sure Algy does not understand exactly. He said something about your seeing him in a cab with that Mrs. Welles from down in the country. Now, of course, some women might dislike that, but surely you are too sensible. You know—or perhaps you do not know—but Mrs. Welles was once, so I have heard, quite entangled with the family." Theo looked at her narrowly. She could hardly believe that Alice had swallowed the story that Captain Innis had told her, and of which Lady Fortescue had heard. It was a tremendous joke if she had. "Arthur Innis never was at all straitlaced."

"Captain Innis' friends are nothing to me."

"Oh, no, certainly not! But poor Algy thought that you were angry because he rode across London with Mrs. Welles. Perhaps it was not nice, but he had a very ticklish commission on hand. I think myself that he ought to have confided in you, but then you know that is never a man's way. They never can bear to talk a thing over with a woman until they are obliged to. Algy had made up his mind to try and get Mrs. Welles away from Salby, and you ought to know that such cases require some concessions. Now, may heaven forgive me, most of that is true!" Lady Fortescue added the last sentence in soliloquy. "Don't be hard on Algy," she went on aloud. "You must understand, my dear, that he has a little different way of looking at things. He has been brought up differently. He wouldn't consider it quite nice to talk to a young woman like you of some things."

"I am his wife."

"All the more reason. He was furious with his uncle for telling you anything about Mrs. Welles, and more furious with his mother. After all, I believe, she will not bite. Of course, he never expected you to go about alone and pick up acquaintances. And"—Theo drew a long breath—"he naturally was angry at your giving people a chance to talk by going to Belding.

He is not of our class at all. He is a very decent chap, I suppose, but—you must understand. Now confess you were a little wrong."

"I may be."

"You mean you were. You are coming back with me, and it is all going to be forgotten."

"I cannot come back now. I am going to stay here, or go somewhere on the coast, until my father and mother come."

"Until——"

"Until my father and mother come," Alice repeated. "I am going to take a house for them in London, and I am going to write the whole story to my father. He is the one to decide this matter for me. I need my own people." She was standing by the window, looking out into the busy streets, full of thousands of hurrying strangers. "I am very much alone here," she said almost in a whisper. A mist of self pity came over her eyes.

"Oh, but a woman should not feel at all alone with her husband and her husband's people," Theo said briskly. She did not like Alice, and she was a little contemptuous of her, as one who had no worldly knowledge of her opportunities; but she said "Poor thing!" under her breath. Outwardly, she laughed. "Alice, I wouldn't write to my parents if I were you. That is rather a cowardly thing to do, isn't it? All

young married people quarrel. It is a sort of honor with them not to bring in anybody else. It makes it ever so much harder in the end. Outside people cannot understand the least little bit. Now if I had a daughter who had married, and who came home telling me her woes, I should pack her back to her husband again and tell her to fight her battles as I fought mine. I wouldn't send for my father and mother if I were in your place."

"They were coming any way."

"They would be the last people in the world to want to stir up dissensions between you and your husband."

"And you think that their coming will do that?" Alice turned round, two red spots burning in her cheeks. "Haven't my people a right to come to London if they choose? Am I—because I happened to marry an English earl—to be cut off from any ties of affection? Am I lost, or are they, to all human feeling?"

"I am afraid you are a little selfish," Theo murmured. "But you will come home if I will wait for you a day or two?"

"No, I am going somewhere on the coast with Celeste."

Theo hesitated, and then with a grimace she made a proposition which cost her much. "I will come with you, if you care to have me,"

But her sacrifice was not accepted.

"I do not want any one," Alice said. "I want to go off somewhere by myself and think. One thing I have determined upon. I will ask my people here, and engage a house for them. I want them, and I have a right to have them."

Lady Fortescue felt that she had done enough, and so she told her cousin when she met him in her apartment an hour after she had seen Alice.

"I said about everything. I brought in her marriage vow, and your career, and nothing seemed to move her. She is going to bring over her brood of Americans, whatever comes. You always were a fool, Algy, and you have been pressing the poor child too hard. And this last escapade! You told me you had given that——"

"It isn't worth while to discuss that matter," Lurgan hastily interposed. "I cannot let Alice behave like this. She shall not make a scandal. She shall come home."

"Sh—sh—! It will be you who will make the scandal. Let her have her head for a little while. I have persuaded her that in this last episode she has mistaken you. But there are other things. Let her go to Brighton, or somewhere, for a week or two, and direct your energies to the other side of the Atlantic. What sort of a woman is her stepmother?"

XVII.

IN three days Alice was in a lodging house in Brighton, with her maid and a man servant. She had received a note from Lurgan, expressing his disappointment at not seeing her for several days, as business made it necessary for him to run over to Paris. His cousin had told him that she wanted to go to the seaside for a little while. He inclosed some bank notes and some blank checks; and had taken the liberty of sending her a man servant of unusual intelligence. The note was entirely respectful, and there was no hint of a quarrel anywhere.

She discovered another agent, and from him engaged a house for her father ; and it was with more than a degree of reluctance that she filled out one of Lurgan's checks to pay the sum necessary to insure the place being kept for her. Then she went down to Brighton.

It was warm and balmy here, much more so than at Salby Chase, but she was oblivious to the weather. She was confronting what she felt to be the problem of her life. And yet she had thought the same thing only a few short months

before, when she gave up Chris. Life was growing too full of problems.

She wandered out on the piers, and sat on the benches for hours at a time, watching the ships and yachts go by, and unutterably lonely. She wanted Connie's hearty laughter, her father's handsome face and courteous gentleness, her stepmother's strong character. More than anything else in the world, she wanted—Chris! She did not let herself think his name, but Chris himself, Chris who had always been her compass, who had always been there, not to advise, but to act—the want of him was so bitter that she felt she could not live without him. She never had learned to live without him, and when she tried it, what a wretched failure she was making of it!

She had not written of any trouble with Lurgan to her stepmother, but she had written a short letter to her father, in which she had told him that she had discovered that all of her dowry had gone to her husband, and asking him to give her an allowance. Money had been the one thing which Mr. Sanderson had given to her in unlimited fashion. It had no particular value in her eyes. She would not tell him yet; perhaps she never would tell him, that she had been hurt and insulted by her husband. Everything would be set right when they came over. She had gone through the great rooms of the house she

had taken for them, and had seen, in fancy, her father's home established there. What a haven it would be! They would know Lady Lurgan and her husband, they would learn that she could not be treated like a child. She had always seen the combination of her father's wealth and her stepmother's tact so powerful that nothing seemed impossible to them.

And then, deep down in her heart, was a lurking thought to which she would not give a place. She would at least hear all about Chris. Her heart was fairly hungry to hear somebody pronounce his name. She might have grown to forget him had she been only passably happy. She tried to remember that he had not loved her, but she felt that although he might not have loved her as a man should love his wife, although he had been glad to know that she was the wife of another, and that all of his responsibility in the matter of her happiness was ended, yet he had loved her like a brother.

Alice had cabled at once that the house was taken, and had written, begging them to come immediately. She wanted to see her husband again from her father's side. She felt that she could not bear to go back to the humiliation of the past few weeks.

Every day she looked for a cable saying when she might expect them. The time for letters

came and passed, and still no message. It was almost three weeks before Celeste came up one morning and brought her the thick American letter with her stepmother's well known handwriting on the envelope.

She broke it open, and fairly devoured it with her eyes. As she read on and on, her face grew pale, and lines too old for its delicate outlines seemed to settle about her mouth and eyes. She read it two or three times, as if she could not quite believe in it ; then she turned over on her pillow as she had done another morning when her stepmother had given her words of counsel, and felt that life was hopeless.

After a long time, she called Celeste, and asked for a telegraph blank. Her pen hesitated over it after it was under her hand, but she finally wrote to her husband in Paris :

I am ready to return to Salby Chase when you come for me.

A. LURGAN.

XVIII.

WHEN our lives are running along in their accustomed grooves, and we are as fairly happy as the restless leaven of life will allow us to be ; when we are in distress, or when we have for its brief instant the intoxicating wine of life before us—at all times we are self centered. The tragedy of another's life may play itself out before us, but we are too busy watching the cues of our own exits and entrances to pay much attention.

The third year of Alice's married life was wearing itself away, and she was beginning to wonder what sort of a young girl that Alice Sanderson had been who had taken life so tragically. She was somewhere back there in the dusk of time, in the chaotic beginning of things.

To the people she had left behind in Chicago she was "that pretty Miss Sanderson who married the Earl of Lurgan the other day." No one seemed to wonder why she never came home. They had never expected that she would come back. What could Chicago be, except

dull and stupid, to one who was accustomed to the glitter of foreign courts, and to great old English country houses, and all the gauds of life among the aristocracy gilded by American millions? When the Chicago people thought of Alice, it was in a court train with feathers in her hair, making her bow to her sovereign, or as entertaining princes and potentates.

She had been at court, not once, but three seasons, since her marriage, and had had her name in the lists of fashionable people in London almost the regulation number of times. Not quite, perhaps; for the Lurgans were not ultra fashionable. There was a lack on both sides of the family which prevented that. Lurgan had not taken to politics, as his mother had hoped. He had been too easily turned aside, and had found more amusement on the turf and in other like ventures, to take the position of a solid English supporter of the crown. The elder Lady Lurgan was in the habit of laying all his shortcomings to the fact that there was no heir to the house, and sometimes expressed her opinion in public as well as in the semi privacy of the family circle.

It was very seldom that the family circle was not stretched to include half a dozen people, nowadays, and they were always Lurgan's friends. Alice had made almost none. Now and then she met a compatriot who attracted her, but they

generally began talking of people and events in America of which she knew nothing. She had come away so young, her social life had been so short, and she had not seen her family since her marriage. She thought bitterly that she had no home, as other people knew the term.

Lurgan's latest venture was a theater. He was backing an actress who had made a phenomenal success, the season before, in one of those plays with long names and short morals. She was a woman who had had something of a story, one that had enlisted the interest of a great many people. Just at the moment she was the fad of one or two women of fashion, one of whom, as a consequence, had been thrown very much with Lurgan, and was just now a guest at Salby Chase.

Mrs. Henderson was one of those women who are eternally restless, externally looking about for some mental excitement or dissipation, and usually finding it in a more or less original fashion, which puts them momentarily in the eye of the curious public. Her husband was the son of an ancient family which had transmitted glory and fame, as well as fortune, to its descendants, placing them, in the estimation of the old society in which they lived, far above the titles of most of the people who were their friends. John Henderson Henderson, of Castle Bevin, was a name which shame had never stained, and if, for

a generation or two, it had not shone with especial brilliancy in some ways, it had in others ; for the present Henderson was the best known big game hunter in England.

When he was very young, he had married one of four sisters famous for their beauty and chic. Their mother, a good natured woman who had been a social success herself, had brought out all four within two short seasons ; and while other mothers looked on in amazement at her temerity, she had married them all off to the most eligible men to be found. They were tall, rather curious looking young women with fine necks, slender waists, and a great deal of hair. They had worn astonishing frocks, and their photographs were sold in the shop windows by the side of those of the royal family, with their names printed in gilt letters beneath.

Mrs. Henderson had attracted more attention than her sisters, because she had more audacity. At the time of Alice's marriage she was in America, somewhere in the Northwest, with her husband. They had spent eighteen months in a cabin in the mountains, and had shot grizzly bears and all the other wild animals which abounded in that region, bringing home the skins and innumerable photographs. Mrs. Henderson had seen her pictures in the London magazines and weeklies for months afterward, taken

in her buckskin leggings, with her rifle in her hand, or on snow shoes, and in every other fashion known to sporting illustration.

The new actress, and more particularly the author who wrote her plays, were Mrs. Henderson's new passport to advertising. She had taken Lord Lurgan into a sort of partnership. She said she found it necessary to have masculine advice, and Mr. Henderson was in Africa.

An American, seeing Mrs. Henderson loaf across the lawn at Salby Chase, would have failed to observe the beauty which was supposed to have made her famous. She was the farthest remove from the type that is considered most attractive in the United States. Her hands and feet were slender and well shaped but large ; her waist was too short, her legs too long, her black lashed eyes too large, her hair too exuberant. To American eyes she was distinctly bad style, and Alice looked at her with a sense of repulsion which she analyzed as the result of an irritation of her sense of good taste, rather than as any actual dislike or disapproval.

It was almost tea time, and guests from the house were wandering down to the terrace where Alice had established herself under the trees. Lady Fortescue, in the last stages of mourning for her husband, who had been dead a little more than two years, sat by Alice's side. She had

shaded off from black to violet and whites as artistically as if she had been a basket of pansies made up by a fashionable florist. The delicate colors were not particularly becoming to her, and they made her peevish. They seemed to absorb some of her exuberance. They were not at all the sort of thing she would have chosen to wear of her own accord, but her martyrdom to convention was almost over. It was over altogether, so far as the convention of grief was concerned.

To Alice the talk was tiresome. It was free and easy, after a fashion, but with a restraint which she was quite conscious they would not feel in the smoking room at night, or even out here after dinner, when she was sitting quietly indoors. It was simply the chitter chatter of a half dozen people who had many of the same pursuits.

The new wings had been built at the Chase, and the project just now under discussion was the turning of one of the large new rooms into a theater. Alice did not let a ripple of annoyance touch her mind, though nobody thought it worth while to ask her opinion concerning the arrangement of the house. That was Lurgan's province.

"You surely would like to see me act," Mrs. Henderson said, her eyes looking up into Lurgan's face.

"What sort of parts do you prefer to play, Mrs. Henderson?" young Tannehill asked.

“ Oh, the lady who wears the lovely gowns and behaves wickedly. There’s no fun in being good on the stage. One is obliged to be good in real life every day. There is no sense in going into theatricals simply to play over again what one does every day. It is the delight of being really devilish now and then. Did you never notice what a popular character *Forget-Me-Not* has always been? Now my favorite character, if I could choose, would be——”

“ *Rebellious Susan?* ” Lady Fortescue asked politely.

“ Not exactly. I think I should enjoy being the young lady who sings in the music halls, and talks back to the audience. She appears to me to have no end of a pleasant time—and so exciting! We know pretty generally what people are going to say in our own set, and our powers of repartee get rusted from lying idle. There must be such a sameness in our answers.”

“ Now I should never accuse you of anything of that sort,” Lurgan said. “ It seems to me that you give us variety.”

“ I quite agree with my cousin,” Lady Fortescue added.

“ How good of you!” Mrs. Henderson smiled with the expression of receiving a compliment hovering about her mouth.

Captain Innis, who had taken his tea to the

stone steps which ran down to the Italian garden below, chuckled a little. He liked Lady Fortescue, but he could not resist the temptation to rejoice over her fight for supremacy. She had been the smartest woman in the company for so long that she hardly knew how to treat this new claimant for honors.

"Why not turn the wing room into a music hall?" Lurgan suggested.

"That will be easy enough at any time. First let us have a stage and some scenery. Let us do it now, while I am down here. I want to help to arrange it."

"There isn't any reason that I can see."

"Come along and let us look at it," Mrs. Henderson said impulsively, rising to her feet. "Let me see what it is like. I have forgotten the dimensions."

She started toward the house, only Lurgan following, and then she turned back. The half smile on Lady Fortescue's lips had nothing whatever to do with her turning.

"Won't you come along, Lady Lurgan?" she said affably, and when Alice smiled and shook her head, she went on: "You don't mind my running off with Lurgan for a little while? I'm awfully anxious to see that room, you know."

"Not in the least."

"That woman is the most insufferable creature

alive," Lady Fortescue said. "I beg your pardon, Alice, but I really cannot understand why you tolerate her."

"She simply does not annoy me at all. She is not my guest."

"Whose is she, then? Surely not Aunt Cecilia's?" Lady Fortescue knew quite well, but she was in the disagreeable humor that wishes to force unpleasant subjects to the front.

Alice laughed aloud.

"You have not been in to see Lady Lurgan, then? She went to Scotland this morning."

"I usually wait for Aunt Cecilia to seek my society, my dear," Lady Fortescue said; and then a determination took her, and she arose, shook out the frills of her gown, and put up her parasol.

"Mr. Tannehill," she said to the young man, who had looked disconsolate since Mrs. Henderson had left them, "let us go and see if that wing room will do for a theater;" and they walked away together.

Everybody had gone, and Alice, sitting there alone in her wicker chair, turned again to her book, to whose companionship she was becoming more and more accustomed. It was something of a relief to have her husband's mother away. It had long been a theory of Lady Lurgan's life that anything could be brought about by force of

will, and she had not yet realized that she had an impossible task in trying to bring her son and his wife together again. Nothing would make her see that she had had anything to do with separating them, and she bitterly upbraided fate for having taken the dominion over the earl out of her hands. The son who had looked to her to manage his estates, to get money out of them for his expenses, and still keep them intact, was a different son from the rich young man whose income was almost princely. He would not quarrel with his mother, but even into the house which she had called hers ever since she had come to it a bride he was bringing guests of whom she disapproved.

Lady Fortescue and Tannehill went up to the house and over the soft rugs of the great hall leading into the new ball room which was to be made into the theater. The place was large and scantily furnished, with great divans running along the walls. As the two entered, lifting the portières which hung inside the doors, they could see Lurgan and Mrs. Henderson at the other end of the floor. They were not looking at the dimensions of the room. Lurgan was holding Mrs. Henderson's hand, while she stood with her tall, exaggerated figure silhouetted against the afternoon light streaming through a window out of which she looked indifferently.

XIX.

LURGAN and his wife saw little of each other in these days. He came and went, and she asked no questions; nor did he ask any when she took her maid and went up to London for a few days. When she went through that first London season she added nothing to her popularity. She had been a cold and a dead woman. She had not even asked, or thought, whether or not Mrs. Welles occupied the little house which Lurgan had rented. She had disappeared from the neighborhood of Salby, but Alice found herself thinking that she would not have cared much if the woman were still there. It was no particular concern of hers. Lurgan was as nothing to her.

She had almost ceased, in these three years, to pity herself. It is the bitter, miserable tears of self pity which wear out the heart and the brain; but Alice had too much character to give way to this indulgence. She began to have that terrible cynicism of the young who have never realized an ideal. Even her father had failed her. When she had put down that letter from her stepmother

which had come in the midst of her rebellion, she had found herself possessed of a calmness which was almost calculating in its coldness. It was as if her heart had been suddenly cased in an armor of ice. She lay there among her pillows as she had lain on that earlier day when her stepmother had come to her, and felt that life held nothing for her.

The letter told her that her father had had great losses ; that he had thought it best to give Alice's dowry to her husband, as every wife's duty was to her husband, and her husband's home should be hers ; that he was bitterly disappointed that she had shown so little self control, so much childishness. He was ill, Mrs. Sanderson wrote, and nothing would do him any good but the assurance that Alice had gone back to her husband. They would not come to London this year, but go to Alaska. There was a little hint, too, that she hoped that Alice would not ruin Connie's happiness by making a scandal in the family.

Alice had looked the question squarely in the face, and had gone back. What else was there for her to do? How could she know that her appeal had never reached her father, that Lurgan had written a long letter to her stepmother, giving her some frank statements, telling her that Alice was unmanageable, and was threaten-

ing to leave him when her family came to London? An earl for a son in law, and then a scandal—that would be a downfall of Mrs. Sander-son's house of cards which she could not tolerate.

The house at Salby Chase was filling with guests. It was not far from one of the great watering places, and it was the season for the sea shore. Lurgan's new yacht, the "Au Revoir," lay at anchor near by. A great ball, a play in the new theater, to be hastily improvised, and plans for a series of other gaieties, were making the place alive with enthusiasm. Mrs. Henderson, with her insolent face, her deep voice, and her loafing gait, seemed to be directing things everywhere.

At dinner one night in the midst of the preparations, a servant stood respectfully at Alice's elbow, and, as he offered her a dish, slipped a telegram beside her plate. As she slit it open, and saw that it was a cable, she grew a little paler, but made no comment. There was only one line :

Papa very ill. Sail at once.

CONNIE.

She knew the steamers, and their sailings. Her eye could never slip by that column in the papers. As she sat there answering questions, speaking calmly and evenly and as usual, her mind made calculations. If she started that

night she could reach Southampton in time for the sailing of one of the fast ships. The train would leave London at nine o'clock in the morning. She finished her dinner, and when the ladies rose from the table she went into the drawing room with her guests, but stopped only a moment. Then she flew up to Celeste.

"Celeste," she said breathlessly, her heart beating now so that she could hardly speak, "my father is ill. We sail for America to-morrow morning."

"But, my lady, the tickets! I think at this season——"

"There are always some berths. I go if I go in the steerage. Pack at once."

Alice began to take off her white dinner gown with shaking fingers. She had had no time for grief. Even death could not take her people farther away from her than they had been; and of death she could not think. She was numbed. She only knew that there must be action; that she was going away from here; that she was going back to America, and that somewhere there was her lost girlhood. She drew in a long breath, and in it she felt her native air.

She had changed her dress, and was moving about putting things into bags, folding, gathering together her toilet appliances, when there was a sharp rap at the door.

"Come," she said unthinkingly, and her husband stood in the doorway. She looked at him startled, and with some embarrassment. It had been months since he had come near the threshold of her apartments, but he walked quickly in and closed the door.

"What is the matter?" he asked. "Are you ill, that you are not down stairs?"

"No, I am preparing to go home. My father is very ill. They have cabled for me. I am going to sail for America tomorrow. I have sent Celeste to telegraph for tickets."

"Do you think it necessary? We have—er—there is a large party in the house. Would it not be well to cable over and ask for particulars? Probably it is some slight attack which is not at all serious. It will take you almost ten days to reach Chicago, and in that time he may have——"

"Died," Alice finished calmly.

"If you care to put it in that way, yes. He will have done that or have recovered. In any case it can hardly be necessary for you to go."

"I am going." Her lips were compressed, and she did not look at him.

"You surely cannot expect to leave a house full of guests in this fashion, with people coming every day?"

"Not my guests—yours. They will not miss me ;" and then she stood up beside the trunk which she had pulled from a closet. "Do you suppose that I would stay away for anybody or anything? My father is my one close relative—the one person in the world to me."

"It appears to me that you made a vow once to leave your father and mother." Lurgan spoke almost with flippancy.

"We will not discuss that now, if you please. I am going to America tomorrow."

"You surely do not expect me to go with you?"

"Most certainly not."

"I suppose I might telegraph for my mother?"

"Or let Lady Fortescue act as hostess. She will make a better one than I."

"Perhaps that would be just as well." He arose from the couch where he had been sitting, holding his hands around his knees. "It is hardly necessary to say that your father is dangerously ill. I will simply say that you are called to America on business. Theo can carry on the house party here, at least until mother's return." He got as far as the door, and then he turned again. "What time do you leave?"

"On the midnight train."

"I suppose I might as well say good by now—

unless you would care to have me go up to London with you?"

"No."

"Then good by. I hope you will find you have made a mistake in going."

"I shall not do that, in any case."

Lurgan opened his mouth as if to speak again, and then thought better of it.

"Give my love to your mother and Constance."

"Yes."

Suddenly Lurgan took her by the shoulders and held her facing him.

"What is the use of all this pretense? You mean to get over there and stay. You never intend to come back."

"You are quite mistaken. If I find that my father's health has improved, I shall probably come back very soon."

"To go through this farce of living! You are more dead than alive. I have no wife. What can you expect of me?"

"It is hardly necessary to discuss that question now. You have what you married me for, and I suppose I have what I married you for, although Heaven knows I hardly thought what that was at the time. I think we may now say good by."

Lurgan walked down the hall with an emotion

in his heart which he knew would make him disagreeable to Mrs. Henderson.

“She will stay if he dies, and I suppose she will get a divorce.” He snapped his forefinger and thumb together. “Glad enough shall I be!” but the expression of his face was not glad.

XX.

THE journey to London was taken alone but for Celeste and a man from the office of the estate to see that the tickets were properly secured ; and before Alice realized it, she was on the ocean on her way to America. The six days of the voyage left her still in a state of numb expectancy. In New York she was met by an old friend of her father's, a sober business man whom she had never known well, and who seemed to stand in some awe of her as the Countess of Lurgan. He had no hope to offer her. Her father was still alive, but very ill and very weak, he understood. He stroked his thin beard, and evidently wished that some one else had been deputed to meet this daughter of Sanderson's. How could he know, poor man, that Mrs. Sanderson had carefully thought how the item in the papers would sound, recording the fact that one of the greatest financiers in the country had left Wall Street to escort Lady Lurgan to her train? She was quite shrewd enough to know that it would mean far more in London than the name of any social dignitary in

America ; and it was upon Loudon that Mrs. Sanderson had her eye.

Alice did not stop between ship and train, except for a hasty luncheon at a hotel. As she left the table, and stood for an instant in the hallway, she saw before her a back whose outline sent a chill through her very soul. It was a conventional back—a little broader than ordinary, a little more erect, perhaps, but like that of thousands of other well groomed and well set up city men. The hair above it was quite gray, and as Alice saw this in the fleeting glimpse she had, she knew that it could not be Chris. She almost hated herself for the heart throb that the resemblance had given her, but she could not get it out of her mind all the way across the country.

The long run ended at last in the Chicago station, where old Granger came forward to meet her. There were tears in the old man's eyes, and at first she could not speak to him. She had thought Connie would be there, or—her heart had beat between hope and fear ever since she left New York—that perhaps it might be Batterman.

"He is alive, Miss Alice," old Granger said, "but he is very ill. Miss Connie wanted to come to meet you, but Mrs. Sanderson thought it best not. I just would come, myself."

The houses along the Lake Shore drive were no longer the palaces she remembered, but rather dingy dwellings, lacking space and taste. Even Lake Michigan seemed less blue. The great Sanderson house, which she had felt might be compared to any historic home she had seen since she left it, was little better than the rest ; but when she stepped from the carriage into the dusk of the great porte cochère, and felt two warm arms about her, and a fresh satiny young face against her own, something in her heart seemed to give way for a moment. With a cry of "Connie!" she gathered her young sister into her arms, and the sobs which came into her throat wrenched her very soul.

When she was calm again, she found Mrs. Sanderson beside her, too, and they were all three together in the library. It was the room where she had told Chris that she did not love him, in that distant past. There was an indefinable change in the room since then. She could not tell exactly what it was, but the newness that she remembered was so far gone that there was no trace of its ever having been there. The prevailing tone was as mellow as time itself.

Mrs. Sanderson was in a costume which almost suggested widowhood. It was as if she were entering the valley of black and decorous grief as gradually as she expected to come out of it.

There was about her, too, a change which was greater than the three years would warrant. She was no older in appearance. Her complexion was as smooth and lineless; but she seemed to bear a new dignity, an assurance, which perhaps had something to do with the consciousness of having a daughter who was the Countess of Lurgan.

But Alice looked at Connie with amazement. The lanky girl of fifteen that she had left was now the tall, beautiful woman of eighteen. Connie did not belong to the class who are children until they are twenty. Life was too vivid a thing to her for her not to bloom early. She was like Alice a little, like her father a little, and like her mother in an intangible something which spelled power. She had the genius of personality. Her young face was all warm and full of life, but there was more than a suggestion of coldness in her large eyes.

"Take Lady Lurgan's wraps up stairs to her old rooms, Celeste," she said to the maid. "Come along, Alice, let me get you up stairs. I know you are tired to death."

"But how is father? When can I see him?"

"As soon as you are ready, dear," Mrs. Sanderson said. "We have told him that you are coming, and he expects you, but you must not excite him. He is very weak."

"I will go now," Alice replied.

She unpinned her hat, and started up the stairs toward her father's old room. Her face was drawn with emotion, and her stepmother put her hand on her arm warningly.

"My dear," she said, "you must be calm, and you must not excite him. He does not know how seriously ill he is. It would be fatal to tell him, the doctor—we all—think. He likes bright faces about him. Make him think you are perfectly happy—in being here with us again." Even now she would see that there were no confidences between father and daughter.

Alice hesitated again at her father's door, as her stepmother went in to prepare him for her coming. As she opened the door, he lay on the bed, facing her. So white, so thin and weak was he, that his bloodless face was almost the color of the pillow ; but it was animated by a great tenderness as he saw his daughter, and he put his arms wide for her as if she had been a little child.

The thinness of the chest against which Alice put her head almost broke her heart. She drew her lip between her teeth and held it there to keep from crying aloud. Everything was so different. Nowhere in the wide world was there anything as she had left it.

"I have missed you so," her father said, and "I have missed you so," over again.

Alice put her arms about the slender, emaciated body that had been so big and strong and erect, and said his words over after him. Then her father laughed a little.

"I had to get sick to bring you home again, eh? I know how quickly the time ran by. I wanted to come over this last year more than I can say, but there were always so many things to interfere, and, besides, your mother was keeping Connie for a surprise. But, tell me, where is Lurgan?"

"He could not come. He, too, had so many affairs."

Her father smoothed her hair wistfully.

"I suppose you will want to be going back to him very soon. We cannot hope to keep you long."

"Longer than you think! Now that I am here you are not going to lose me again in a hurry."

She was beginning to be more cheerful, to conquer her emotion. Although her father was so pale and thin, his voice was natural. It seemed to her only a case of "building him up" to make him himself again. But when Alice started to go out of his reach for a moment, he clutched at her hand weakly and held it in his poor thin one.

"I cannot let you go yet. You must tell me all about your happy life over there. Looking at

you, I cannot imagine how we have let the time go by without going to see you. The months went so fast, and they doubled into years before one fairly knew it. But I knew that you were happy. That meant so much to me."

He looked at her wistfully, as if he would assure himself.

"It meant a great deal to all of us," Mrs. Sanderson said sweetly, rubbing his brow, upon which a bead or two of sweat stood, with her delicate handkerchief. "But we knew that a young couple who were just starting life together did not want their plans interrupted by parental claims."

Sanderson's eyes left Alice's face for a moment, and looked at his wife, whose dominion over him had never for a moment lessened; but he still held his daughter's hand.

The door opened rather abruptly, and Connie came through, excitement on her face, making it anything but the subdued countenance of a sick room.

"Papa," she said, "Chris Batterman is down stairs. He has just come back from New York, and I told him I was sure you would want to see him. You do, don't you?"

Mrs. Sanderson started forward.

"Oh, Connie, how could you!" she exclaimed. "Your father is not able to see any one."

“Yes,” Sanderson said eagerly. “Chris! Bring him in at once, Connie.” His voice gasped and almost failed him at the last word.

“No!” Mrs. Sanderson said. “No, no, dearest, you know that you are not able to see him!”

But Connie had opened the door, and Alice stood there by her father’s bed, her heart like ice, and saw Batterman, a new Batterman, broader, sterner, older, with gray hair above his browned face, come through the door. He walked to the other side of her father, and the two men clasped hands. Sanderson half lifted himself from his pillow, tried to speak—then gasped and fell back, dead, his hands holding close the hands of his daughter and of the man she loved.

XXI.

WE may be lost in grief, but the machinery of our material lives must go on, and the common sense which governs the same must govern our actions and even our thoughts.

Her father's death, so sudden, within minutes of her return, and the circumstances attending it, made it seem to Alice almost like a terrible dream. In these three years she had grown so much accustomed to living alone, to having no communion with others in her sorrows and heart-aches, that she could think of no earthly comfort now. For one instant she had turned toward Chris, but he was not looking at her. He had put her father's hand down, and leaning forward, had lifted the poor, thin body in his arms, almost before the last sigh had come through the nerveless lips.

She hardly knew how she found herself in her own old room, the room in which she had heard the death sentence of her happiness. She was sitting by the window with dry eyes, finding comfort—quite unconsciously to herself—in the thought that Chris was down stairs taking every-

thing into his hands. In all her grief, she had not failed to see that there was a change in Mrs. Sanderson's treatment of Batterman. She had tried to keep him away, but now that he was here she was glad to give everything into his charge. If Alice had not noticed it, Connie would have called her attention to it later in the evening.

Celeste had come in with a tear stained face, bringing some dinner on a tray, and followed by Connie. The younger girl had thrown herself on the couch beside her father in a passion of sobs, until Chris had lifted her away and almost carried her into another room. He said no words of consolation. There were none to say. The hurrying servants, the doctors coming, made a bustle all through the house. Mrs. Sanderson had walked into her bed room and shut the door, pushing even her daughter away from her. What that death meant to her ambitious heart and brain only she could know ; and perhaps, in that first moment, she found the realization a terrible flood which swallowed up her imaginings.

Connie was comparatively calm, and her first words were directed toward the dinner. It was almost nine o'clock, but the late twilight had not fully left the sky and the lake, although it was the edge of autumn. Celeste had thrown shades over the globes of the electric lights, and the whole was in a cold, white dimness.

"Can you eat your dinner, Alice?" Constance asked. "You must try to. For the last month I have been growing accustomed to papa's illness. I *felt* that he was going to die, but mamma said not. I know, now, that she knew it all the time, but she would not let herself think so. She did not want me to cable to you, but the doctors were talking in the hall, and I overheard them. But—oh, Alice, I can't get *used* to it!" she wailed.

Alice put her arm across her shoulders and comforted her, while her own heart felt as if it had been deadened. Presently, when she was calm again, Connie went on:

"It is such a comfort to have Chris here again. We hardly see him any more."

"But isn't he—hasn't he been with father?" Alice's surprise made her ask.

"Not since you were married. Didn't you know? Oh, Chris is a great deal richer than we are! He has great mines in Mexico, and has built a town somewhere in the Northwest, and owns a lot of things here in Chicago and in New York. He is so busy that we do not see him, I suppose. Mamma was not very pleasant to him at one time. I think they had some sort of a quarrel. Do you know, Alice, I have thought, since I grew up, that it was queer you and Chris never fell in love with each other? Of course I

suppose it was lucky you didn't, because you wouldn't have been a countess, and it must be a great thing to be a countess. *You* never have to snub people then, to show that they aren't quite so good as you are. You are a countess, and that ends it. But I can't imagine anybody being really any grander than Chris."

Alice let her arm relax about Connie's shoulder, and then involuntarily she drew it a little tighter again. She would scorn the idea that she was jealous of her own sister. Chris was nothing to her—he never had loved her. He was a strong, good, honorable man ; nobody had ever had anything else to say of him. Her meddlesome conscience told her that she ought to be very glad, very grateful, if in this hour, when she was losing her father, a noble, good man like this could be near. And yet—that seemed the bitterest thing of all.

After a while, when Connie had gone away, and Alice had undressed, she turned off the lights, and lay among the very pillows of her girlhood, with her curtains put aside so that she could look out on the lake. If Chris were going to marry Connie ! Of course he would. She had grown to expect only disasters for herself. She could not live near them. She knew that her mother would come to London to live. She must do something.

Her mind ran on these thoughts for days. She kept her own room, and did not see Chris. She knew that he was there. After the first day, the rooms were filled with women, who came with mourning dresses to try on. Mrs. Sanderson, with a handkerchief always in her hand, called up the servants and gave them their orders, and saw people about the thousand and one arrangements. She talked much to Alice of her plans, asked her opinion, and gave her bits of information. It seemed to Alice, presently, that her father's death was something that had been long thought of and prepared for.

The night before the funeral she called Celeste to her.

"Where have they put him?" she asked. It seemed easier to ask a servant than her step-mother or Connie. They might ask her to go with them to see him.

"In the library, my lady."

"And who is there?"

"There is no one. Grauger and James and—some others are in the next room."

It was late that night when Alice, in her soft white gown and slippers, stole through the halls, down the staircase, and into the dimly lighted library. Her father lay almost on the spot where Alice had stood that morning, but she did not recall it now. She only knew that the only

friend she had in all the world, the only person who truly loved her, was lying there. She forgot, she had no temptation to remember, that when she had called upon him he had failed her. She knew that whatever he had done had been out of love for her, and she was beginning to understand that perhaps he never had known; perhaps the story of her great misery had never come to him.

The beautiful face was calm and peaceful and gentle, as it had always been. The sight of it unlocked the fountains of Alice's heart, it made her the clinging girl again, the little daughter. She had closed the door into the room where the men sat, and was all alone. A great sob came up into her throat, fairly tearing her as it came, and she fell down on the floor beside her father's body, her hands clasping his, which lay across his placid chest. She knew that she said some words aloud; she knew that she cried in broken accents, cried out to the still, cold, placid figure all the love, all the longing which had been stored up in her heart, and which she thought was dead. She made the appeals that some shyness, some wall of reserve, built up carefully by her stepmother, had kept her from making to her father in his lifetime, until she slipped from the place where he lay, and fell moaning with long, tired sobs to the floor.

Then she felt herself lifted and taken out of the room, into a little reception room where a great divan bordered the wall. There was no word spoken, and she did not open her eyes, yet she knew that it was Chris.

"Shall I bring some one to you?" he asked presently.

"No, no, I will go."

"Not yet." He put her back. "Alice," he said, "I heard some of the things you said. I could not help it. If you are unhappy, you must let me take your father's place. I have known you ever since you were a little girl. I loved your father more than you can know. He would have given his life to make you happy. Let me arrange your plans, do anything for you, as he would have done if you had let him know."

Alice quivered as she lay, and a great longing came over her, as it had come so many times before, to tell it all to Chris. Then—she could not. He had not loved her. His very presence was happiness and torture to her. Why weren't all men like this one?

She shook her head slowly. Batterman took her hand, which she had no power to take from his firm, warm grasp.

"Alice," he said, and his voice was full of a sweetness which was solemn, "whatever you are or are not to me, you are your father's daughter,

and I have the right of the man who loved him most to take up the work he left unfinished. It was there where he is lying now that I told you that whatever service I could do for you I was ready to come from the ends of the earth to perform. I meant that then, just as I mean it now. I offer you my allegiance as your father's daughter. You cannot refuse me that."

"You can do nothing for me," she said. "Nobody can do anything for me. I must live my own life." She had regained her calmness now. She had a terrible fear that he would see below the surface, that he would see and know that she loved him, that the bitterest sting in her unhappy days was to look at him and know that he was out of her life, that he—better, greater, growing every year into a fuller and nobler existence—was to go away and leave her again, with her bruised, sore heart more than ever needing him, the one balm nature had made for all of her ills. She had married that he might not know it—and she must not tell him now; but she could not stand his tenderness.

"Alice," he said again, "treat me as your brother. Let me be your brother."

"I never had a brother," she replied evasively. "I am afraid I should not know——" She put her handkerchief to her mouth and turned away. She could not speak again, for she had a

horrible fear that she would begin to make that appeal to the living Chris that she had made to her dead father, lying there in the other room.

She gave him her hand for a second, and then he watched her go swiftly up the stairs, her long white gown trailing after her, his own heart almost bursting with a burning indignation and a passionate longing to protect the woman he loved.

XXII.

THE days after the funeral were a blank to Alice. The excitement, the grief, and the change had prostrated her, and she lay in her own room, looking out of the window. Almost every hour in the day Mrs. Sanderson or Connie sat beside her ; and always they talked, and, bit by bit, plans which Alice could see were old plans, well laid, were brought carefully forward. They were to go to Europe at once—to the Continent, Mrs. Sanderson thought, until their mourning was lightened, and then it would be well to go to London and take a house there.

One day Connie, who had been sitting silent a long time, said abruptly :

“How rich do you suppose we are? How do you suppose papa has left his fortune—equally divided between you and me?”

“Hardly that, I think,” her mother answered softly. “Alice had a great fortune given her upon her marriage, and your father doubtless expected you to have the same.”

“I suppose so,” Connie said.

But the idea was a new one to Alice. She

would have money, then? Once again the gates of freedom seemed to open to her. She could go where she pleased and do what she would. She would never, never return to Salby Chase! She would go somewhere, perhaps here in America, and live the simple life she had once thought of. Perhaps she might go back to the little home they had had in the Western mining town. She had been happy when they lived there; and then a picture of it as it was now appeared before her, and her face flushed. It seemed to be in the depths of solitude, encompassed by loneliness, and she knew that it was because Chris was not there.

Lurgan was welcome to the money that her father had given him. It had been what he wanted when he married her, and he might have it. Her father was dead and could never know now, could never be pained by the thought that she was unhappy. She was glad that he never had known. Her mother and Connie could take care of themselves.

But even that dream was to end. There came a day when the will was read, and Alice heard the lawyer reading the words in which her father left her his love and affection, and a thousand dollars as a token of love, her fortune having already been settled upon her at her marriage. He bequeathed a sum to Constance equal to that

given to Lurgan when Alice married him, and the residue of his great fortune, with all of his personal property, was left to his wife. A most proper and considerate will, everybody said ; and Alice looked at her stepmother and realized that her father never had known, never had had her letter asking his help. He had died thinking her happy in her married life.

The contents of the will were cabled to London, as the Countess of Lurgan was interested, and in the first mail came a letter from Lurgan urging Mrs. Sanderson and Connie to come to London.

“Connie must be getting to be a great girl now,” he wrote, “and with her fortune we must marry her off properly. Alice needs somebody to chaperon.”

After that, the going was almost a matter of days. Mrs. Sanderson had everything packed in the great house, had a caretaker put in, had her announcements in the papers, and was ready to take the steamer before Alice fairly realized that she was going back into the old bondage. She smiled at herself now and then, at her futile dreams and air castles. She seemed to have done nothing else all her life ; but her smiles were not pleasant to think of.

They reached New York two or three days before the steamer sailed—days which Mrs. San-

derson filled full. On the afternoon before the sailing they were having their luncheon in their own parlor in the hotel, Connie and her mother in their bonnets, ready to go out again in a few moments, when the waiter put a card before Mrs Sanderson

“ Ah, it is Chris ! ” she said, as if Chris were the dearest friend she had in the world. “ Tell him to come in ; ” and she rose to meet him with a pretty gesture.

Although Mrs. Sanderson's dress was in the plainest depths of woe, it was cut becomingly, and she seemed to have cast off years, so that she looked hardly older than Alice. Her hair, which had been parted so long, was rippled back from her fine, smooth forehead, and while her manner was serious, there was a latent suggestion of coquetry in the way her head moved under her black veil.

Alice had known that she would see Chris before she went away. He had promised to say good by to them in New York, yet it was with a thrill of pure nervousness that she saw him again. It was as if her secret was fairly pushing its way to the surface, defying her efforts to hold it down. It was too great a thing to have been put in her keeping—one of nature's own, which she never intended should be kept.

As he came in at the door, her eyes took in all

the manly beauty which had been added to him since three years ago. He was older, graver, larger. The look of boyishness had passed from him, although he had not lost much of his youthful slinness; but the grayness of his hair above his bronze cheeks gave him a look of maturity and dignity. He had always been a little finical about his dress, even in the old days, and now he was as elegant as a diplomat, or as any well dressed American. But the look which fascinated Alice, as it had fascinated her in the old days, was his look of confidence, of power, of genuine kindliness. It was that which she had missed in her own husband, and in the men she had known abroad. Young Belding had had some of it, after the American fashion. Probably it was as common in England as in the United States, but its expression was not so frank.

"It is so good of you to come to see us off," Mrs. Sanderson said cordially. "Come and have some luncheon with us."

"I have had my own," Batterman said coolly, and then he turned to smile in Connie's face.

She took a white carnation from the table and went around and decorated his coat.

"Chris," she said, "they say I'm done with lessons. So far as I can judge I don't know a thing, except how to read and write, and it has

always been amazing to me how I ever learned that. I did it before I was old enough to be conscious, or I wouldn't."

"What do you want to know?"

"Oh, I'm satisfied, only I had an idea that the world wanted something more. But I am to go abroad and pick up a few pointers, and then mother and Alice are going to marry me off. An earl was good enough for Alice, but you know the family mustn't retrograde. I think they design me for a king."

To save her life Alice could not keep the quick flush from her face at the mention of her marriage, and Batterman looked up in time to catch it. He was not so quick as Mrs. Sander-son, however, and there came into her eyes an expression which made them ugly for the moment, narrowing them to points of steely light. There was inflammable material here, material she meant to use.

"Constance talks nonsense," her mother said smilingly, as if the girlish nonsense amused a weary, sorrow sick heart.

"I know mighty little else to talk," her daughter said dryly, "and I am disinclined to sit silent. Chris, are you coming out with us this afternoon? Mother is trying to buy a mourning steamer rug. Now have you seen anything of a steamer rug——"

“Constance!”

“I beg your pardon, mother.” She went over to her mother’s side and took her hand, but Mrs. Sanderson walked by her into her bedroom.

“There, I have done it,” Connie said ruefully; “but how on earth was I to know that it is so much worse to talk about a black steamer rug than it is to buy one? Chris”—looking at him solemnly—“I fear I am a hard hearted, inconsiderate young person, with a total lack of delicacy. I’ll go in and apologize to mother.”

As she knocked on the door, Batterman sat down beside Alice and put his hand under the turn of his cheek. It was an old trick of his, one Alice remembered in the old days when he had lived with them. Then, even though he was always there, and was like a brother to her, he used to set her heart fluttering when he sat down beside her, but not as it was fluttering now.

“I hope you will pardon me if I am impertinent, Alice,” he began, “but I want to ask you concerning your affairs.”

Just then the door into Mrs. Sanderson’s room opened, and she came out without her bonnet, and with a patient look of sorrow on her face. Alice turned to her at once, to hide her embarrassment.

“Are you not going out?”

“No; my head aches a little. Christopher, I wonder if I may ask you to drive down town with Constance? I have an order which she must attend to, and I am almost afraid to let her go alone. Will you do this for me?”

Batterman rose at once.

“I shall be very glad to go,” he said, “but I have something to say to Alice.”

“She is not going out. She will be here when you come back.”

After the carriage had driven away, Mrs. Sanderson walked back and forth across the room, and then came and sat down by Alice.

“Alice,” she said, “I believe Chris wants to give you some money.” She spoke with perfect calmness, as one stating a commonplace fact, but it brought her stepdaughter to her feet.

“What do you mean?”

“Only this. Pardon me, dear, if I am saying too much, but you are my dear daughter, you are my husband’s daughter, and I feel toward you as I feel toward Constance. I think that Chris is like every other man. He fancied that you cared for him once, and he cannot get it out of his mind that you may now. He thinks that you may be unhappy with your husband.”

“Why? Why?” Alice fairly gasped. “*Why* do you think so?”

"Be calm. Because he showed it when he spoke to me of the provisions of the will. He knows that Lord Lurgan has your money, as your father thought was proper, and he, having the most American ideas concerning the independence of women, thinks that all wrong. Your father felt that he had amply and properly provided for you, but Chris thinks differently. He fears you are unhappy. Perhaps, good and sweet as he is, it would flatter his vanity to think so."

"How you mistake him!" Alice said disdainfully.

"Perhaps, but I have known men a long time. At any rate, I believe the feeling will prompt him to wish to give you an income. He is enormously wealthy. His income in one year is almost as large as our whole fortune. I tell you this that you may make up your mind."

"Mr. Batterman cannot give me an income."

"Oh, yes, he can, if you will let him. He will tell you of some forgotten investment which your father made for you, and which was put into his hands—some old property of your mother's, perhaps—which has increased in value. Really, there is no reason why he should not. He has been everything that is good. He might almost be a member of the family."

Alice was standing at the window looking out

into Fifth Avenue at Thirty Fourth Street. It was the high tide of the afternoon procession which takes the air there every day. The crowds of tall, well dressed, handsome women went by on the pavement, and in high backed victorias, or neat broughams, with here and there a hansom threading its irresponsible way in and out. It was a gay, happy looking crowd. The first frost had driven people back to town, glad to see the familiar streets again. Alice wondered if in all that crowd there was one woman who was so humiliated, so miserably unhappy, as she was.

She did not answer Mrs. Sanderson, but stood watching, thinking, seeing only years of dull unhappiness ahead of her in a long life. Presently she saw the carriage containing Constance and Batterman drive up to the door. She watched him give her his hand, saw them turn to come up the steps together, the most distinguished looking pair she had seen all the day, a pair other people turned to look at. They seemed young, just entering upon life, while she was an old woman.

She turned away and went into her own room.

"Please make my excuses for this evening," she said, as she passed her stepmother.

When Connie came in, bringing the atmosphere of the gay, busy town with her, for all her

black draperies, and with Chris behind her, Mrs. Sanderson had ready some polite regrets concerning Alice's headache. Batterman went down to the waiting room, wrote half a dozen lines on a card, and sent it up to Alice. In a few moments the boy came back with an answer. It was a courteous excuse, and a hope that if she did not see him in the morning she might some time soon have the pleasure of meeting him at Salby Chase, where Lord Lurgan would be very happy to assist her in entertaining him.

It was the first time since her marriage that Alice had made an invitation in her husband's name.

XXIII.

Alice went with her stepmother and Connie to a villa they had taken in the south of France, not far from Pau. She was in mourning, she could not have the house parties which were beginning to be customary at Salby Chase, and no objection was made to her going where she would.

But Alice was not satisfied. Mrs. Sanderson wearied her, and she surprised herself by finding that Salby Chase seemed, as she thought of it now, in its solitude—for Lady Lurgan had gone away to stay with relatives, and Lurgan had taken chambers in London—as a sweet place of retreat. It was pathetic to see this sweet, home loving, home making nature cling to its instincts under the most adverse circumstances. She was not happy with Mrs. Sanderson. She wondered if her stepmother had always been as she was now, or if she herself had changed so much. It displeased her to find that Mrs. Sanderson subscribed to a press clipping bureau, and carefully looked at every mention which was made of them.

"It is perfectly proper that people should know from what point of view the general public sees them," her stepmother said one day, when Alice found her going through an envelope of pasted slips.

It seemed to Alice, presently, that she was regarded more as the Countess of Lurgan than as a daughter of the house; and then it was that she grew homesick for the only semblance of home left to her—Salby Chase. She planned to go there without telling any one. She would take Celeste, and there were servants enough in the house to look after her simple wants.

It was December now, not far from Christmas, and Alice thought out plans that she had originally made last year. Her being in mourning would not interfere with her Christmas trees and school feasts. It had been a long time after her encounter with Mrs. Welles before she had taken up her work among the people on the estate again, but she was alone in it now.

One morning, as she and her stepmother and her sister sat together under the striped awning which covered half the terrace of their pink stucco villa, she told them, quite casually, that she was going back to England. Connie protested, but Mrs. Sanderson made almost no comment, except, "I suppose Lord Lurgan is growing impatient over your long absence."

Mrs. Sanderson planned to take a house in London for the following spring. She and Connie would still be in mourning, but it was something to come into the great city, and learn its ways, before it became necessary to take up the battle for social life there. And Mrs. Sanderson wanted to give that clipping bureau something to do. It would take her some months to decorate her great house in London, and to breathe in the atmosphere. Alice left behind her at least one person whose brain was large with plans.

Connie not only saw her go with loud regret, but insisted upon going with her. Upon that project, however, Mrs. Sanderson used her power of veto.

"I am sure I do not see why we cannot," Connie said. "There is nothing in this dead and alive place but idiots of Frenchmen and cactus and blue sea."

"I did not suppose you cared for gaiety just now, and I am sure that is not what your sister is leaving us for."

"She is leaving us for some sort of life, I will wager," Connie said crossly. "By the way, Alice, do you know these people that the paper says Lurgan has been giving a dinner party for? Some actors and queer people like that."

"I know nothing about them."

“ Well, you may know that when I get married I am going to find out exactly what is going on. Maybe you’d better go home. When the cat’s away, you know ! ”

But it was not of her husband and his theatrical dinner parties that Alice thought when she reached London. She found its roar refreshing. It was the great city ! After seeing New York and Chicago, the pictures which she had held of these metropolises of her native land dwindled. After all, she decided, if freedom had come to her—and now she supposed that it never would or could—she would live in England.

As she thought of freedom, she thought of Batterman’s generosity. He would have made it plain to her, if he could, that she was a rich woman in her own right, after all ; but she feared that he knew her secret ; knew that she was lonely, sick, longing for the touch of a sympathetic hand. Her face burned at the thought. She was glad, almost, that she was in a different part of the world. How could she go about her daily tasks seeing Chris every day, and never betraying herself ? It was too much to ask of any woman. She would let him do nothing for her, and he would be over there in America. There was a comfort in the thought which made the hot tears spring to her eyes. Taking up her life, now, meant entering upon a long road whose

first break must be the shadow of death. There was no destiny for her except the humdrum one of daily life. By and by the dust of every day events would sift into the ugly scars that were left.

One cannot grieve always, even for one's dead parent or one's dead consciousness.

XXIV.

WHEN at last the Sandersons were settled in London, their coming made less of a ripple in Alice's life than she could have dreamed in that far off time when she had first thought of them there. Mrs. Sanderson's mourning rapidly lightened itself until it was only noticeable in the way of collars of black velvet sewed with pearls around her throat when she wore her evening dress low, and in a reminiscent tone when she spoke of America—an attention to her native land which she bestowed less and less whenever the conversation was in her own hands. When her English acquaintances took it in theirs it was generally directed toward America. They appeared to rest under the idea that Americans must be astonished at everything they saw in England, and would delight in lecturing upon their native manners and customs to a civilized audience. Mrs. Sanderson was a woman of infinite tact, and very clever at warding off dangerous subjects, but Constance was either less clever or more audacious.

Lurgan had welcomed them in London with

something like effusion. He was doing a great many things with a little more manner than was usual with him. His spirits were high and feverish, and he was going about more this season than ever before.

Mrs. Sanderson had waited until all her plans were completed, and then had taken a house in Park Lane, one of which had a coat of arms carved over the doors and the gateways. She had smiled a little as she took it, and Constance, quick to read her thoughts, had turned to Lurgan, who walked through the picture gallery of their new abode by their side.

"They talk about Americans caring for money! When an American has money enough to own a house like this, he does not let it to the first chance comer, ancestors thrown in."

"He hasn't any ancestors to throw in, generally," Lurgan responded amiably.

"But he has plenty of respectable bath rooms," Miss Sanderson replied. "Of the two, I believe I prefer the latter for daily use."

But they were very comfortable in the ancestral home of a duke, with its lovely old walled garden, and in the society which flowed in upon them there. Mrs. Sanderson was entirely in her element—in an element which Alice had never known. The pushing she had done with her husband's money in Chicago had left her with

a rather thick skin—callous, indeed, here and there; and instead of shrinking at a blow or a push, she very promptly returned it, if not exactly in kind, at least in a way which the recipient remembered. Presently Mrs. Sanderson, “the rich American widow,” and her pretty daughter, became something like the fashion.

Lurgan’s marriage was reported to have turned out well. His wife was everything that was desirable, and “good form” in a quiet way; rather ignorant, no doubt, and an alien, but she had brought him a fortune and had not annoyed him. And here was another sister much handsomer, much richer, for of course she was her mother’s heiress. But there were one or two shrewd brains who looked that matter twice in the face.

“See here, Alice!” Lady Fortescue said one afternoon, as she stopped her carriage by Alice’s in the park, “who is this good looking American chap your stepmother is leading about? Is she going to marry him, or is she training him for Connie?”

“Whom do you mean?”

“Oh, come! It’s all in the family. Is your stepmother thinking of marrying again? I am sure there is no reason why she should not. She is young and pretty. She actually appears to grow younger every day of her life, and she’s a

rich woman. I met the American there yesterday. It appears he was at the same place when they were abroad. Did you know him in America?"

"Do you mean Mr. Batterman?"

"Of course. He has been everywhere with them for the past week."

"You know I have had a cold for a week, and Connie has had so many engagements——"

"Of course," Lady Fortescue said. "I have asked him to my dinner dance next Thursday. I had no idea you had such respectable looking men in America. If you grow them like that over there, I'm sure I don't know why you come to England husband hunting. He's as big and well groomed, and appears to have decidedly better manners than most of the men about. And I suppose he has those beautiful ideas about letting a woman have her own way which we hear are so common in America. It is we poor English women who suffer!" And Theo drew a deep sigh, while Alice smiled faintly. Lady Fortescue had never allowed the slightest dictation as to her own movements during her married life.

The victorias parted, and Alice went on. People bowed to her, and then said to one another that Lady Lurgan gave herself airs, which was only to be expected of an American.

But the poor girl, a girl still in heart and conscience, and in that tender sentiment which would never allow her to grow old, was carrying on a war within herself which left her miserable. Chris was here and she had not seen him ! The very mention of his name as it flew to her lips had sent a tremor over her. She fairly ground her teeth together in her vexation with herself, and back in her throat was a lump which she could not put away.

It was Connie. It must have always been Connie. He was so fond of her as a child. They had always been friends. She would conquer her own feeling ! She would treat him like anybody else.

On Thursday night her maid wondered what the matter could be. Lady Lurgan, who never even asked what gown she was to wear, who read a book while her hair was being dressed, had all at once become something more than particular. She had suddenly ordered changes made in her gown. It had been heavy with lace, but she had that taken out and soft frillings of white chiffon put over the shoulders. After her hair was dressed in the ugly English fashion made popular by the wigs of the Princess of Wales, she had it all taken down and arranged in the soft bronze knot which she had worn in America.

"It is lovely," Celeste said, "and quite my

lady's style. 'The other is aging. If that beautiful color can only be kept in the cheeks, it will be charming !'

But as the carriage drew near Lady Fortescue's house, the " beautiful color " faded completely, and it was a white woman with wistful eyes and a drawn mouth who greeted Batterman when he came to speak to her for the moment before dinner. It was only a word, but it was one to which Alice replied in the stiffest tones. All through the long succession of courses and the gay talk she sat silent and distrait.

There were two places at the table where interest centered, one where Connie was, and one where Mrs. Henderson sat resplendent with Lurgan on one side of her and Batterman on the other. She wore a black spangled gown which was evidently designed to give a serpentine effect. Alice heard the woman beyond laugh to the man on her left, and say :

" That gown reminds one of Mrs. Henderson's old desire for the music hall stage, doesn't it ? "

And the reply was not even whispered. " She has made a mistake. That is the dress of the lady contortionist. "

" Where did she get that tiara ? " was the next question ; and Alice felt rather than saw that the man made a feint of looking at her own, as if to see that it was in its place, before he said :

“At any rate, they are not the family jewels.”

Cold to iciness on the outside, in her heart she was sick with anger. Once she thought, “How can I sit here, insulted like this? What have I done to have such a life? Is it that I am wrong with the world?” She sat where she could look at Batterman, but she kept her eyes resolutely turned away. She could not bear to face him.

When Lady Fortescue arose, after picking up her guests with her eyes, Lurgan, as her cousin, sprang toward the door to hold it open for her to pass through. As Alice went by he smilingly leaned toward her, so that to the room it looked as if he were giving her a friendly word, but what Alice heard was, “You pay Batterman too great a compliment,” in the cold, sarcastic voice she had almost ceased to dread.

After she had gone, Lurgan’s spirits appeared to grow higher. He sat down near Batterman and began to talk to him in a way which attracted the attention of every man at the table. His manner was so jovial that it was almost patronizing. Batterman looked at him with something like toleration for a moment, and finished the cigarette he had taken up when the ladies left the room.

“If you are so much interested in Mexico and Mexican mines,” he said, closing a conversation

in which he had taken no part, except to answer Lurgan's point blank questions, "I will have my secretary send you some lists of statistics, or you can have them at any time by addressing my offices in New York."

The men who had been listening looked at the tips of their cigars, or the table—anywhere but at each other or Lurgan's face. As he spoke, Chris arose and passed to the window, out of it, and along the flowery balcony to the drawing room. He did not get near Alice, but sat down by Lady Fortescue.

If he had looked at Alice he would have seen a woman who had been born anew in the past few moments. After all, a woman is only a woman, and human nature is deep within us all. As she had married Lurgan because she would not be pitied by Chris, so now she could and would sink her sadness when he was here again. Here, too, was Connie, and Connie's happiness must be considered; and here, too, was her own jealous heart. If Lurgan could see, Batterman might see. He could not, he should not. Again she would show him that it was all a mistake. He should think her happy. She would give him to Connie. Of course, she told herself, she had nothing to do with it, but she would be happy if she knew that Connie was going to marry so old and good a friend as this,

And as she said it, there was a burning lump in her throat which almost choked her. She wanted to get away somewhere out of sight and fight her battle out. She was a wicked woman to begrudge her young sister her happiness, and yet, deep in her soul, she knew now that she had always thought that Chris would never marry. How could she think of him as there in the family, as her sister's husband—Chris, who belonged to her? She was ashamed and she was heart sick, and her emotions worked upon her as a fever. The face which had been pale a moment before became brilliant, as if a fire were shining through alabaster. The red lips parted to let the breath through; the brown eyes, with their flecks of gold, widened and took on a new light, and the woman who sat by Lady Lurgan found that she could talk. All the pluck of her pioneer race rushed to the fore. She was not the girl, now, who had come here ignorant, a little afraid, unconscious of her ground. She was the woman who knew every shade of the manners of her time, all the jargon of the society in which she lived, all the social values. She had kept her cards put away indifferently, but now that the time had come when she felt the impulse to play them, she knew her game; and she had no mistakes to live down, except those she had made in the beginning of her domestic life.

She was sitting near Mrs. Henderson, and she turned to her suddenly and asked what her plans were for August.

"Are you and your husband disengaged for the fortnight after we leave town. Will you come to us—both of you? I hear he is to be back in London again very shortly."

Self possessed and ready as Mrs. Henderson habitually was, she could not prevent a slight change in her face, and she did not answer at once.

"I shall have to consult my husband," she said finally. "I do not know what plans he may have made."

"Do so, but try and persuade him to come. You know we shall miss you so much if we have theatricals."

And Alice, with a smile of kindness which made Mrs. Henderson set her lips together hard, passed on. She sat down by her stepmother and told her that she was arranging an August house party at Salby Chase, and wanted her to bring Constance; and then, with her head up, and this new light in her eyes, she passed on to Lady Fortescue and Batterman just as Lurgan and the rest of the men came into the room.

Batterman rose at her approach, and she stood beside him, looking squarely, laughingly into his face, making a picture that Lurgan had

never seen, showing to Chris the old Alice mingled with a new Alice, and astonishing Lady Fortescue.

"Will you come to Salby Chase for the first fortnight in August?" she asked them both. "I am going to make up a house party, and we shall have theatricals."

"Now you must know I cannot," Theo said, "because I am going to have some people myself, and I have just invited Mr. Batterman to stay with me, and he has accepted. It is on the shore, so you will be fairly comfortable, and the Augusts in our country are not too hot," she explained to Batterman.

On the other side of the room Mrs. Henderson was talking to Lurgan.

"What has come over your wife? Do you know what she did just now? She asked me down to the Chase for the first week in August to have theatricals! It looks as if our plans were going to be taken out of our hands."

Lurgan hardly heard her. His eyes were on his wife and Batterman.

"Oh, well, you are coming."

"It's rather startling to be asked to make one of a house party in a place where you had supposed you had made your own plans for that time. Did you, or did you not, tell me to make up my own party for Salby Chase for August,

and didn't you say you would see that the plan was carried through?"

"All the simpler, if Lady Lurgan makes it up."

"Not at all."

"The worst of a woman is," Lurgan said, "that she likes to come just to the verge of compromising herself. Isn't it a thousand times better to get what you want if you can have it arranged naturally?"

"I do not care to be a puppet in Lady Lurgan's hands."

"I'll promise you are never that," Lurgan said, and from the tone of his voice it was evident that he had ceased to bow entirely to Mrs. Henderson's will.

XXV.

ALTHOUGH Mrs. Henderson did not have her vanity satisfied by letting the whole of her world understand that she, and she only, had arranged the house party at Salby Chase, it was there, and she was in the midst of it by the early days of August.

London had become a howling wilderness, from which everybody but the tourist and the people who could not get away had fled. At Salby, the breeze from the ocean swept over the great lawns, about the terraces and gardens, and through the wide rooms. It was a pleasant company which Lady Lurgan had gathered together. She laughed at herself bitterly when she saw how easy it had been to carry out her plans when she lost all anxiety as to their success. One human brain can only hold one passion at a time, and her intense desire to take away from herself, as well as from others, all knowledge of her love for Batterman, and of his strong influence over her, caused her to change all her habits in the twinkling of an eye. She went back to Salby Chase with the manners of its mistress. There

was one brief instant in which she met the dowager Lady Lurgan, but it passed.

"I am very glad to see that at last you are taking some interest in the house," the elder lady said. "But I hardly call it auspicious that you should begin your invitations to the Chase by bringing that Henderson woman here again."

"She is a great friend of your son's," Alice responded coolly. "I prefer to invite her here myself. The world might be censorious enough to talk, otherwise."

Lurgan was at the door as she spoke, and as he came into the room his mother repeated the words to him.

"Alice says that she is obliged to ask Mrs. Henderson here to prevent your doing so and making a scandal."

"Very kind and considerate, I am sure," he responded, picking up his morning letters and running them through his hand.

Alice, without a change of countenance, went on with her breakfast. A few minutes later, when his mother had left the room, Lurgan turned to her. She could see by his face that he was thinking of some retaliation for the blow he had just received.

"And so your stepmother prevented your marrying Batterman because she cared for him herself! It is extremely generous of you and

'Theo to throw them together down here. I'm not so everlastingly sure that Theo is not a little fond of him herself. He appears to be just the sort of chap to take the fancy of a woman. I think it altogether likely that neither of them has any particular chance. He is an ambitious, pushing young man. He will probably find some girl of family and social position who will marry him, now that he has money. That is what he is likely to look out for, just as he tried to marry you when he was poor.'

"Who told you that Mr. Batterman wanted to marry me?"

"It was perfectly plain to every one. By Gad, I believe you would have done it, if I hadn't come along and taught you that you had the same ambition that he had—to get on in the world and leave the sphere you were born in."

"I certainly left the sphere in which I was born when I reached one where a man may insult his wife," Alice said, and she arose and left the room.

The sun was shining outside, the heads of the roses that grew along the stone terrace were heavy with dew and their own sweetness. She took her garden shears and began cutting them, forgetting, except for a vague, uncomfortable resentment which she had grown never to lack entirely, what her husband had said. He was

as nothing to her. His life did not belong to hers at all. She pushed him away as a disagreeable subject. She despised him a little more because he could believe that Chris had wanted to marry her on account of her fortune.

Lurgan left his letters and the breakfast table, and came to the window, watching her. There was a line of dissatisfaction between his eyes, a gnawing at the corner of his lip which showed an irritation he seldom allowed to become visible. He felt that he had been in some manner deceived. This was not the woman he had so tamely and quietly allowed to put him out of her life.

The next few days found no new flattery for his vanity. Mrs. Sanderson and Constance were the first of the guests to arrive. If Lady Lurgan the elder had had any intention of passing them by, she found that she had met with an impossibility. If there was any patronage, it came from the other side. It is hard to tell what tack Mrs. Sanderson might have taken before this new development in Alice, but now she pushed her advantage. Her first idea had been to class herself with the dowager as a guardian spirit of the "young people"; but when every advance was met with stony impertinence, Mrs. Sanderson took a new ground, and blandly informed Lady Lurgan that she was sure she need never be

afraid that Alice would find her a trouble ; that the young countess was extremely kind, and would probably make her feel at home at Salby Chase as long as she cared to stay.

“ Old people never seem to annoy the dear child,” she added blandly. It was said so sweetly, and with such an evident desire to put her at her ease in the house she had ruled so long with a rod of iron, that Lady Lurgan found no answer capable of expressing her feelings.

Connie found herself supremely happy here, and every day, when Alice looked at her sister, she tried to put down within herself the pang of envy with which she saw this buoyant young creature entering upon all those things of which it sometimes seemed to her circumstances had bereft her. Almost every day Batterman drove or rode over from Lady Fortescue’s house, and always he was to be found with her stepmother or Constance, walking or sitting on the terrace.

Alice came up through the park the first day he came down, and saw his back, as he walked along by Constance’s side, his riding stick behind him in his gloved hands, his broad shoulders only two or three inches above the fine ones Constance carried so proudly. Alice leaned against the balustrade, a little sick and faint for a moment, and then she walked resolutely forward to meet them, that flame of undying purpose in her face.

"Won't you stay to luncheon, Mr. Batterman?" she called. "We are to have Mr. Fielding, the great actor. He has kindly consented to give out the parts of the play and set the actors to rehearsing properly."

"Who's to play?" Constance asked.

"Oh, it is a sort of reward of merit, I believe. I do not even know the name of the piece. Mrs. Henderson takes the chief part. She knows Mr. Fielding, and has induced him to come down. Probably you will be asked, and perhaps, if you stay, Mr. Batterman, you may get a chance yourself."

"Do stay, Chris," Connie said. "I am going to keep you, in any case. Who knows? They may cast me for something, and I may need a lover. I couldn't consent to go falling about in anybody's arms but yours."

"In that case I see nothing left for me to do. Thank you very much, Lady Lurgan."

Fielding was a very great man indeed in a certain London set, much affected at the moment. He was supposed to act upon some peculiarly arranged principle which was made up of the intuition of genius and the science of a sort of second sight. He talked in a very beautiful way about it, and was most impressive at dinners; but being at bottom a very shrewd man, he managed to do some very excellent work all around,

and his little fad hurt nobody, made him an object of worship by a number of women, and might in time bring him a knighthood, if the queen lived long enough.

When the luncheon was over and the play was brought out, he passed over the heads of three or four ladies whose experience in the lately revived fashion of theatricals was as great as time had permitted, and for the second character of the play pitched upon Alice. It was a short part, entirely subordinate to that of the brilliant woman of the world which was to be played by Mrs. Henderson.

At first Alice refused point blank to take it. The great actor looked at her sadly.

"But the part is yours," he said. "No one else would know how to play it instinctively. In these private theaters we must get the real thing. The stage training which would make any woman adapt herself to any part is wanting here. Your husband is to take the part with which you will play. There can be no objection, my dear Lady Lurgan, I am sure."

"Oh, take it, Alice," Constance said.

Lurgan came forward with his hands in his pockets, and said, with an expression and tone which sounded rather humorous to the listeners who were not in the confidence of the family and its domestic relations, "Of course, if Lady

Lurgan objects to me, and would prefer another, I will retire."

Mrs. Henderson, with some additional color in her cheeks, said nothing. She had not expected Lady Lurgan to be included in the cast, but she had no possible objection to her being there. She had absolute belief in her own powers—a belief which had been strengthened by Fielding, who had told her that she would probably make a success upon the stage if she were a nobody.

Ever since that night when Alice, quite unconsciously, had invited her to Salby Chase to make one of the party which she had considered of her own arranging, Mrs. Henderson had looked upon Lurgan's wife as in some way a rival. She knew that Alice was nothing to her husband, who was bound hand and foot, seemingly, to her own chariot wheels; but here was a new Alice, a woman she had never seen before, and instinctively there arose in her heart a fear of what she might do next. As with all connections of this character, as Lurgan became more and more necessary to her, as she gave him more and more room in her life, she saw the slenderness of the bond by which she held him, and she saw what an advantage he would gain by going back to his wife. Alice was always Lady Lurgan. That dignity, and the dignity of her pure, sweet life,

could not be taken away from her. Mrs. Henderson could not conceive of the state of mind of a woman who would repulse the erring husband who came back to his allegiance.

In this theatrical project, she felt that she could show herself to Lurgan, and to everybody else—and she saw that other people's opinions had a tremendous weight with him—as infinitely Alice's superior in all those things which men such as he most admired.

The rehearsals began almost at once, and Mr. Fielding only stayed long enough to give them a fair start, when he went back to London, leaving Alice with some advice and a complete copy of the play. She welcomed the diversion gladly. It was growing harder and harder, instead of easier, as she had hoped, to be compelled to meet Chris every day. The play gave her an excuse for wandering off into solitude, and for turning many of her duties over to Lady Lurgan and her stepmother.

The rehearsals were like all the rehearsals of private theatricals, everybody trying to be as stiff and unnatural as possible in an effort not to be ludicrous. Batterman was asked to act as stage manager, at the last moment, after the man who had taken that onerous duty was suddenly called away ; but there had grown up a wall of constraint between him and Alice which neither

could define. To Batterman came a consciousness that he was distressing her, and with it was born a determination to go away. With that determination was mingled the understanding that, between Mrs. Henderson and Lurgan, Alice stood in need of friendship. He was not misled by the light heartedness which she was assuming ; and whatever her need was he resolved to aid her. He would stay in England, and leave his address with her ; and then his own sense told him that, whatever her stress, she would not send for him.

Mrs. Henderson had gone up to London to arrange her costumes, which were those of a French marquise of the time of Louis XV. It is to be feared that Alice was not entirely frank when she said that she had not given hers a thought. In reality, she had intrusted the dress she wore throughout the entire play into the hands of her stepmother and Coustance. It was supposed to be that of a young French girl just out of a convent, and when Alice put it on she felt a vague thrill of memory. She wore a wig of the clear blond white of that day, with its curls upon her shoulders. Her gown was of white crêpe, and around her shoulders was a frilled cape of fur.

When she came upon the stage, Mrs. Henderson, forgetting her own part for the moment,

looked at Alice critically, and saw in her simplicity something disturbing. To Batterman in the wings, and to Lurgan on the stage, the dress and the face above it brought back a late summer evening in Chicago by the lake side, and a young girl, this young girl, fresh from her convent, inexperienced, full of the joy of the promise of living, was between them again. To one came the great heart pang of a loss which was ever new, and to the other an exultant sense that he had won.

Lurgan's part went to pieces, and so did Mrs. Henderson's, but the audience did not discover it. The clever Frenchman who wrote the play had put into the mouth of the young girl lines of infinite simplicity in themselves, but full of the most subtle coquetry, and Alice made every word tell. She realized, as she was saying them, that she never could have originated those lines, for that outer self by which she lived would never have voiced them; but that inner self, which was her real self, knew the shade of every syllable, and brought it out; knew the glance of the eye, the turn of the shoulder. It was as if a creature had been brought alive out of the very air.

Before the play was over, Fielding was half out of his seat, saying, "By Jove! Oh, by Jove! Isn't that a pity!" It seemed too dread-

ful that the actress he had always been looking for was blooming right here before his eyes, and that she was as far out of his reach as if she had been the shade of Peg Woffington. He could not know, nor could any of the others know, that the spirit which was burning, which was lighting up this creature of the moment, was the blazing of half a dozen long buried emotions.

Mrs. Henderson, in her marquise robes, left the stage, and the curtain came down upon Alice in Lurgan's arms. As it fell between them and the footlights, it left them in semi darkness, and Alice tried to slip away, but Lurgan held her tightly.

"Why do you go?" he whispered, and then, when she did not answer, he laughed huskily. "It is seldom enough I have ever held my own wife like this."

"Perhaps——" she said, and then she blushed at the thing she would have said, but it was not in human nature not to think of giving him the taunt, though she despised herself for its vulgarity.

"It is all your own fault," he went on passionately. "You know I love you, and only you. You hate me, you torment me, you drive me away from you."

For the moment he believed what he said. He saw himself as a man who had always had a

passion for a wife who drove him out of her sight, and he pitied himself from the bottom of his heart.

Alice stood with a drooping head. This was something she hardly knew how to meet. A great loathing for the sort of love he would give her filled her soul. She despised herself for the stupid pride and vanity which had made her take this part and act it as she had. It seemed to her impulsive heart that she had become degraded by this life she had seen about her, this life in which there was nothing except vanity and self seeking, until she was no better than any of them.

"You resigned all claim to being my husband long ago," she said at last.

"You always disliked me, and I knew it. When you married me you loved another man. In what are you better than I have been? You, with your fine pretense of goodness, so immaculate that you cannot let your own husband touch you—and yet you have your old lover here under my very eyes!"

"What are you saying? Stop!" Alice began, but Lurgan took her hands in his and held them while he put his face above hers.

"Alice," he said, "come back to me. Let our lives be what they ought to be. I love you. You are my wife. I will throw everything else away."

“How dare you insult me in one breath, and tell me you love me in the next? Let me go!”

“Oh, well! Go to the man you love!” he said furiously, and threw her fairly into Batterman’s arms—threw her with such violence that had Chris not caught her she would have fallen to the floor. Before either of them could recover, Lurgan had walked rapidly away, the velvet cloak of his costume caught back on his tilted sword.

XXVI.

AS Lurgan went out of the room, Alice drew herself out of Batterman's arms, her face showing an agony of shame. It seemed to her that the very walls were crying out her secret. But Batterman held her by her arms, his hands making her conscious of something besides his physical strength.

"Alice," he said, "there is no necessity of your living with that man. This is not the first time that he has insulted you. I will not have you subjected to such insults. If your father were alive he would not allow it. I will not allow it. You shall come away from him."

She looked into his face with eyes that were wide and feverish. The excitement of the days which had gone had taken out the heart of her endurance, and she wanted to let herself go, to break down in sobbing weakness. It had come to this, then, that Chris was, after all, a member of the family, who spoke with authority. She must be pitied and taken care of by him, after all.

"But you are not my father—and he is my husband."

"A right which he has forfeited." Batterman spoke calmly, but he was evidently holding himself by a strong effort. "I may not be anything to you, but I must always be the man who loves you more than his own soul, more than anything except your own happiness. I am, as I always have been, from the time when you were a little girl, yours to do with as you will." He stopped suddenly, and when he began again it was with a realization of what he saw in Alice's face, something he did not understand. He spoke almost as if he were answering some question she was asking him. "I love you," he said. "I have always loved you, and I would give my life to see you happy."

Alice shook, as with a great chill, under his hands.

"Chris," she said—her voice was low, but it was not that she feared to be overheard, for these two were as much alone as every two are under the same circumstances, entirely oblivious to all the world around—"Chris, did you really love me back there in Chicago? *Did* you? Tell me, *did* you?"

"What do you mean? You know I did. You know that all my life, after I knew you, I thought of nothing else. I thought that I saw you growing to care for me. I dreamed day and night of nothing but you. You were the very

core of my life. You are still. It can do you no harm to know that I love you today with the same heart I gave you when you were a child. Only I think of you more, if that can be, for now I know that you are not happy. I want you to be happy."

"Christopher," she said, "I may be a wicked woman to listen to you, and to say this—but you have made me happy." She put her hands up until they touched his arms. "They told me—they told me that you had asked me to marry you out of pity, that you did not love me, that you pitied me because I had shown my love for you so plainly, and that you only spoke to spare us all mortification. And, Christopher"—she was speaking in a perfectly colorless voice, in a voice which was hardly hers—"I married so that you would not despise me for a lovesick girl."

Suddenly she broke down and began to cry, with a spasm of self pity, as she thought what her life might have been, and how she had suffered. Batterman took her gently and put her into a chair, and then he went to a table and brought her a glass of water.

"Do not cry," he said, as if he were comforting a child, and put his hand gently on the side of her head. "Who told you that?" he asked.

"My stepmother," Alice answered. "But, oh, Chris, I ought to have *known*!"

"Yes," he said. "You ought to have known."

He was wondering if there was another man who could have had the strength to hear that the woman he had loved all his life loved him, had always loved him, and yet could go and leave her thus. And yet he could not think of doing anything else. She must be protected. Batterman belonged to a class of men that is a great deal more numerous in all parts of the world than most people who write novels would have us think, and so common in America that such men may be said to be merely average, whose first idea of love is protection. She must be protected from the brutalities of her husband; and above all, the miserable suspicion which he had voiced must be killed at once.

"Alice, listen to me," he said at last. "I must go away, but I shall stay here in England. I shall be where you can always reach me—always. If there comes a time when I can do anything for you, promise me that you will allow no false delicacy to stand in the way. It is best that you should stay here under Lurgan's roof for the present. In a little while you may be able to go away, and to stay away."

Alice put out her hand and held his.

"Oh, Chris," she said, "you will not go away and leave me? I could let you go when"—she

caught her breath—"when I thought you did not care, but I cannot let you go now. You are all I have in the world. You are all I have. I cannot let you go!" she repeated.

"What do you want me to do?" Batterman asked, and his voice was not steady.

"That awful man will kill me. He frightens me. I have lived—you do not know how I have lived," she said. It was as if the years of restraint had broken down all this false strength of hers of which she had been so sure and so proud. In her heart and in her fancy she had lived with Chris by her side. She had done those things for which she felt sure he would admire her; but now that he was here, now that he loved her, her instinct taught her that he was the strong bulwark between her and everything which could hurt her. She was a child again. Chris could take care of her.

"What do you mean by saying that you are afraid of him, that he will kill you?"

"I mean that it has been easy enough to live in this house—with Lord Lurgan—all these years. He has disliked me as much as I have disliked him, but tonight he told me that—he begged me to come back to him. It was when I refused that he said—what he did. Oh, Chris, you must not leave me here! Take me with you. I would be safe with you anywhere. You

love me. You would take care of me. I am so *tired!*”

“You do not know what you are saying,” Batterman said, after a moment’s silence. “You cannot know. But you shall not stay here.”

“But where is there anybody on earth, except you, who cares? These women I live among? What am I to them? My stepmother parted us. She took you from me——” Alice stopped, and put her hands up to her head. “Do not listen to me, Chris,” she said. “It turns my brain. I have always loved you so. I have had nothing else in my life except the thought of you, and now that I know that it has been the same to you, that you have always cared, nothing else seems of any consequence. What can be of so much consequence? Haven’t we a right to our own lives? They were taken away from us. Haven’t we a right to take them back? Whom would it hurt?”

“It would hurt you,” Batterman said. “If I were to take you away with me, neither of us would be happy. You would be miserable because I had allowed you, in a moment of excitement, to give your good name to the tongues of the world. I should be miserable because you were, and because you would have lost something. I could never give you back. My love would be a poor thing if it could not take care of

you now. I am afraid it was a poor thing that it was not strong enough in the beginning. But now that we understand each other, now that I can speak to you frankly, and have you know that I have but one object in my life, I shall try to make another thing of your life. It was all a mistake, and we should be children if we did not realize that such mistakes are for all time. Nothing can ever wipe them out."

"No," Alice said dully. "Nothing could ever wipe this one out. To you I shall always be Lurgan's wife."

"It is enough for me to know that I must not think of the possibility of your ever being mine," he answered. "But, Alice, look at me." He had lifted her up, so that they stood facing each other again. "All my life long I shall live only for you, and all that I am, and all that I have, is yours. I make a sacrifice which you cannot understand in leaving you here. But here you must stay, for the present, at least. I am going now. I shall not see you again until you send for me. But I want you to tell me that you know that you are not alone, that there is one heart that is always yours."

"Yes, I know," she said, but her hands hung limp in his. He put them down gently, and turned and left her, while she sat down again and put her face in her arm.

XXVII.

IT seemed to Alice, in those next days, that she lived in a world of unreality. Batterman had been "suddenly called" to London, and he had left her a note with his London address at the top, and a few words of good by. That was all. Alice did not even feel the expected remorse at having asked Batterman to take her away with him. It was all right; Chris understood. A realization of the change which had come to her dimmed everything, even in the atmosphere which was all over the house, an atmosphere made up of suspicion, of cynical amusement, and here and there of a shocked fear of what might be coming. For Lurgan had disappointed his wife's fears, and had not repeated his demonstration of affection, but was devoting himself to Mrs. Henderson in a way which passed far beyond the ordinary bounds of good breeding, and disregarded the rather lax social laws which govern a flirtation between a married man and a married woman, even in the most free and easy set in English society. Lady Lurgan the elder had evidently been apprised of

some of the country talk, for one morning she appeared in her son's room, and the echoes of that interview were a tradition in the servants' hall for months, carried there by Lurgan's man.

But Alice was living her own life, oblivious to everything. This gentle girl, whose mind and spirit had been formed for all that is good and beautiful, and whose natural expression to the world was all that was womanly, had been so distorted, against her own will, that she was almost unconscious of fine distinctions, was losing her intuitions. She went along in a daze of her own thoughts. The house party dispersed, and the guests went their separate ways, leaving her to her dreams. Lurgan went up to town in the same train with Mrs. Henderson, her maid, and an intimate friend. Mr. Henderson was, as usual, away in some other part of the world.

The sudden beauty, the animation, which had been Alice's for such a little while, faded again, and she was like an alabaster lamp whose flame has gone out. Constance and her mother went on to some friends whom they had made, but not before Mrs. Sanderson had had an interview with Alice. She came to her one afternoon in the hour between tea time and dinner dressing. As she passed through the door, Alice could not help but admire the air of strength and sweet-

ness which seemed to surround her as a garment. She had taken off the elaborate afternoon dress—Mrs. Sanderson never put so stupid a thing as a tea gown upon her fine figure—and was in the white skirt and dressing sack of American undress. Her lineless, calm face was to Alice like a beautiful mask. It expressed everything that was good and sweet and loving; and the younger woman looked at it with wonder. It seemed to contradict everything that she had been told concerning the face as a reflex of the mind. And then, as her stepmother picked up the bottles on her toilet table, and selected one to hold in her hand and dabble with the contents while she talked, Alice let her thoughts run along quite irrespective of the light talk, in a way her solitary heart had taught her in these years.

She wondered if everybody were not equally artificial. She stole a look at her own face in a mirror opposite, and she saw its pale, quiet dignity, its clear eyed innocence, and she suddenly had a disgusted realization that she belonged to the class of women with what is vaguely named a "history." She was a woman married to one man and in love with another; the sort of woman she had always supposed to exist only in a certain class of French novel. Probably everybody was only a whited sepulchre—even Chris! And her heart contracted as she thought it, and then in-

dignantly throw the idea away. At least there was no fault in Chris. He kept sure her faith in the world. And yet she had been made to doubt him once, and her heart hardened toward her stepmother.

"Alice," Mrs. Sanderson said seriously, "perhaps I should not speak of it, but you need the advice of a woman of experience."

"Do I?" was the indifferent reply.

Mrs. Sanderson hesitated. She did not want to antagonize Alice, and yet she felt that by neglecting to speak she was running a risk of greater jeopardy than this.

"Yes, you do. You are treating your husband very badly. You are being a bad wife to him. You are breaking the sacredest vows a woman can make. You are breaking up your home and driving your husband to courses which are going to ruin him and you."

"I have nothing to do with Lord Lurgan's affairs. What he does is of no consequence to me."

"It *must* be of consequence to you. You are his wife. Nothing can alter that. You are his wife. What makes or mars his life makes or mars yours. Do not think that I am coming to you except as a last resort. I went to him, I told him that his conduct was becoming a scandal. He told me that you had pushed him out

of your life, that he had offered you love and devotion, had begged you to come back to him, and had offered to throw everything else——”

“What do you mean—what does *he* mean by everything else?”

“Ah—er—everything except his devotion and consideration for you; that he told you he loved you, that he said everything a man could say to his wife under such circumstances, and that you repulsed him. He has grown reckless. It is your duty to save him.”

Alice looked out of the window while her step-mother talked, and the red came up on the tops of her cheeks in a feverish streak, but her hands were passive and idle in her lap. Suddenly she turned, and to Mrs. Sanderson’s amazement laughed. It was not a particularly joyous laugh, and it was one which went so ill with the face and the character of the girl she knew that Mrs. Sanderson started.

“I suppose Lord Lurgan did say everything a man could say under the circumstances, but the circumstances are not just as they should be. You say it is my duty to take him back as my husband because he has done me the honor—for the moment—of giving me the same sort of affection he has given to perhaps a dozen other women in the course of his life. Do you consider it my duty to accept that?”

"How can you place yourself in such a class?" Mrs. Sanderson said in a sincerely shocked and disgusted tone.

"Because I should belong there if I listened to him."

"He is your husband."

"I am afraid I am growing very heterodox, but I cannot see how a marriage ceremony changes the relation of two souls to each other." She waved her hand as she went on, for Mrs. Sanderson's face looked frightened. "You need not be afraid of anything I am going to do. It is only what I am *not* going to do. I am not going to degrade myself—my own mind and heart and soul—to save the reputation—or even the soul, if such a thing were possible—of a man I despise. He may be my husband. I am not the only one bound by ties. He broke the cords that bound us. Could I stay bound while he went free? Suppose it had been the other way. Suppose it had been I who had insulted him, would anybody have thought that it was his duty to stand and wait for me to come back to him, to be pardoned and forgiven and loved, and my reputation saved? Suppose that I had said, 'I love you—I will throw over everybody else if you will take me back.' What would you have thought of him if he had done it?"

"You are foolish. You have been listening

to the insane cry of those self styled reformers who want to turn the social world upside down. There can't be the same law for men and for women."

"I am not thinking of any law except that of my own heart. I will not degrade myself by association with such a man as Lord Lurgan."

"Why did you marry him, then?"

Alice's breath came in short gasps. "Because you were a wicked woman and told me lies. Because, for some reason which I cannot fathom, you deceived me and made me believe that the man I loved did not love me. Because you played upon the hysterical ideas of a child until I was forced into a marriage I did not understand. And may Heaven forgive you, for I never will!"

"Alice!" Mrs. Sanderson was standing and trembling violently, but her calmness of tone was as usual. "You do not know what you are saying. Heaven is my witness that I said to you what I would have said to my own daughter under the same circumstances."

"That is doubtless true, but your own daughter would better have understood your character."

"I take these insults, because I do not believe that you know what you are saying. You are not yourself. These theories of life which are

the result of the vulgar middle class imaginings of some women in this country, do not properly belong to you. I beg of you, Alice, to see the rector."

"You are mistaken. These ideas, as you call them, I have never heard. I am sorry if other women have them, for they are only born of experience. There is no use in your staying any longer."

She rose abruptly, and started toward the door, as if to leave the room, but Celeste came in with a letter in her hand, and a frightened look in her face. It was a look of apology, too, and she held the very neat square envelope between her thumb and forefinger as if it might contaminate her.

"What is this?" Alice asked patiently.

"It is a letter, my lady. I do not know who sent it," she said, holding it all the time in a way that belied her words. "The man brought it up from the inn in the village, and he is waiting for an answer."

As she gave the note to Alice she was so overcome with acute curiosity that it seemed to quiver in her very finger tips, and arrested Mrs. Sanderson's attention. But Alice took the letter carelessly, and, walking to her desk, sat down before it, with her back to her stepmother, and there seemed to be nothing left for the older lady but

to walk out, closing the door softly behind her. She walked to Constance's room and told her to pack up at once, so that they might catch the evening train to London. She was suffering from toothache, she said, and must see a dentist at once.

Alice read the note over half a dozen times, her face pale and then crimson. There were only a few lines of it.

"Madam," it read, "I am here at the inn in the village, and I have something of the greatest importance to tell you. I will not write it on paper, and I know I cannot come to your house. I beg you, as you value your own happiness, to come to the kiosk by the copper beeches in the park, at nine this evening—Mary Welles."

At first Alice had thrown it from her impatiently. She felt that she had contaminated herself indeed when this woman would dare to ask for a meeting; and then some instinct told her to go. Mrs. Welles probably wanted money. Well, she felt contemptuous enough, now, to give her some. She scribbled "Yes" on the back of the letter, sealed it in a new envelope, and sent it away.

Celeste showed it to the butler as she passed him, and said exultantly, "Her ladyship knows how to treat *her* sort. She has sent the whole thing back."

Mrs. Sanderson and Constance said their good bys.

"I am going to make you go to the Continent with us, Alice," Constance said with fondness, "for you are looking as miserable as possible. You look as cross as all outdoors. Mother has taken a fancy to have toothache and go up to town. It is ridiculous that you do not come with us, instead of mooning about here alone."

"I am not lonely."

Constance looked back at her as she stood on the steps of the terrace, and even as she looked, and before the carriage wheels had made a dozen revolutions, she saw her sister turn.

"Alice is queer. She cares nothing for anybody. It seems to me that when I was a little girl she was affectionate and soft hearted. Now she is like a hard, white stone."

"That is exactly what she is. It must be her mother's blood. Her father was soft hearted enough;" and then they talked of other things.

All the afternoon Alice wandered about, sorry that she had promised Mrs. Welles that she would meet her, disliking herself that such a circumstance could arise in her life. She had actually no idea what could have brought this woman to the Chase. The idea that she wanted to make herself disagreeable, that she had stories to tell, never entered Alice's mind.

The long dinner was duller than usual to-night. There were only Lady Lurgan the elder and Alice. Everybody else had gone. The late twilight left it fairly light at half past eight when at last it was possible to walk out into the park. As she started Lady Lurgan spoke to her. There were lines about the haughty face which spoke of hours when the strong countenance was relaxed into an expression the proud woman would not have cared to let the world see.

"I should like to speak to you a moment, now that we are alone," she said. "My son's life has been ruined by his marriage with you. You are not a child now. You are a woman, and a woman who pretends to have a sense of duty. If for no other reason, can you not try to restore some of the wreck that you have made? The fate of this house depends upon you."

Alice hesitated, and then she said coldly: "If you had thought that earlier, we might all have been happier. But at no time would it have been true. I was wrong to marry your son, but had I been allowed I would have been a good wife to him. You did not allow me. I can do nothing now. But"—she turned with some curiosity—"why do you tell me this at this moment? In what is the situation different from what it has been?"

"You are driving Algernon to extremes. You are causing him to ruin himself, to make a scandal."

"You mean that he is making a scandal, and that you wish me to do what I can to save him from its consequences. When he is making himself notorious before the world is the time when I am expected to call him to me!"

Alice spoke with infinite disdain, and went out of the door. She did not know the short way to the kiosk, and it was late before she arrived there. She saw, seated in the dimness inside, a figure which arose as she came near. She recognized Mrs. Welles at once, although she had never seen her since that day at the station. She was stouter now, just as well dressed, and with a certain look of tranquility which probably no life she might live would ever entirely destroy.

"I am very glad that you came," she said, without any greeting or any nervousness of manner. "I have something to tell you which I think you should know. I know that you do not care for your husband, so that it will be no particular shock to you except that it may hurt your pride. It is your pride that I am relying on to save him."

"Why should *you* care to save him from anything?"

"Well, I have known him since he was a boy,

and I suppose I am still fond of him in a way, although he has treated me badly enough. Perhaps, if I were to be strictly honest in the matter, I should say that, as he didn't quite throw himself away for me, I can't bear to see him do it for another woman. There may be something in that. At any rate, he has made all his arrangements to leave London tomorrow with that Mrs. Henderson. They have been on the point of going several times, I understand, but it hasn't come off. Perhaps you have prevented it. I came to tell you now, so that you could prevent it in this case."

"I can do nothing."

"I suspect that means that you don't care to do anything. You made him leave me. He treated me so badly after that quarrel he had with you that I had to give him up." Mrs. Welles spoke in a quiet tone, as if such an interview were the most natural thing in the world. "And I had known him much longer than you, and had had much more influence over him. He promised me that he would never marry, and I was fool enough to believe him. I never expected him to marry me. I am not sure that I should have been happy if he had. It would have spoiled his life. He liked going about and meeting people, and he would have been miserable when he couldn't do it any more. I used to enjoy

seeing his name in the papers." She laughed a little in a rather comfortable sort of way. "I believe I came to feel a sort of motherly feeling for him. Of course I hated you, but there is nothing wrong with you except that I can see that you are cold natured. You are not very forgiving. After we parted, I hoped he would make it up with you, and you'll excuse the advice of a woman who knows Lurgan through and through when I tell you that you are going the right way to drive him to the bad. Unless something is done at once he has already gone there."

"How dare you come here and talk like this to me?" Alice asked.

Mrs. Welles drew her cloak about her throat with a jerk, and started to go.

"I dare because I want you to save Lurgan from making a fool of himself. I know you are not the sort that wants scandals and divorce in the family, and wants to spoil the chances of your sister. I supposed you were the sort that would try to smooth things over, and I fancy, after all, that you will." She turned after she had taken some steps away. "This is straight, because Lurgan's man came and told me. He thought I might stop it;" and then she went on, leaving Alice with just one word ringing in her ears, and that word was *divorce*!

XXVIII.

THE next morning, at eleven o'clock, Batterman strode up and down the floor of the parlor which Alice had taken at one of the great London hotels.

Alice was trembling violently, as you could see whenever she lifted her hands for an instant ; but she had been speaking in a rapid, even tone.

"Where did they go?" Batterman asked.

"I do not know."

"Do you know that they have gone?"

"I know only what she told me, and that Lord Lurgan is not to be found. I sent Celeste to see this morning. Tell me, Christopher, what must be done?"

Batterman had his hat in his hand.

"I am going after them. I am going to find some way to stop this without a scandal."

Alice stood before him.

"Why should you stop it? It makes neither one nor the other any better that they are brought back and visited by people. Why not let them go, and—let me be *free*!" She brought the last word out like an explosion, and then as

Batterman still looked square in her eyes, they faltered and she sat down.

“ And your name and your life dragged in the dust of two continents ! Not if I can help it. There shall be some sort of a separation, but the divorce court is not for women like you. We have to bear the consequences of our mistakes. He shall bear some of the consequences of his ; but if I can arrange this without scandal, I shall do it.”

But finding Lurgan and Mrs. Henderson was not so easy a task. There were not many people in London just now, and they had been seen nowhere. Two days can slip by very readily without two people being missed, at least two people who are in the habit of going about a great deal. At last Batterman discovered that they were known to have crossed over to France. As the little boat rushed through the blue water of the channel, he drew his coat up about his ears, turned his back to the wind, and faced Lurgan's man.

The man tipped his hat respectfully and walked away, but not before Batterman saw that he wore a look of grave anxiety. Chris went all through the boat in the hope that he might find Lurgan here, but the servant was evidently alone, although he had several handsome pieces of luggage which he was carrying with him.

He made a rush for the Paris train as soon as the boat landed, and Batterman followed. Again, when they reached Paris, Batterman left his trunks, as soon as the man could get his boxes labeled, and went out to see them put into a *fiacre*.

It was early evening, and Batterman, in another *fiacre*, openly followed. They were almost in Passy when the cab ahead stopped. The servant sprang out, and motioned for Batterman's driver to stop. He came close and spoke rapidly.

"Before Heaven, I hope you are following me, Mr. Batterman," he said. "I want you to tell me what to do. His lordship, that I've been with since he was a boy, discharged me a few days ago, and told me never to come near him again; but now I get a telegram to come to this address in Paris, that he is very ill, sir. You know all about the trouble, sir, or you wouldn't be here. I was discharged for telling Mrs. Welles. She tried to keep his lordship from going, and when she couldn't she said as how she was going to her ladyship, and seeing you I know she must have, sir. What am I to do, sir?"

"My advice is to get to this address as quickly as possible, and I will follow you."

With a sigh of relief the man climbed into his *fiacre* again and went on. It was a walled garden

gate at which they finally stopped, and Batterman drove in behind the servant, who was evidently expected. The house was one of the apartment houses of this neighborhood. As they entered the court another carriage turned out, and the unmistakable face of a physician looked at them gravely for an instant.

The two men went up together in the elevator, which they moved themselves. The servant had hesitated, but Batterman had pulled him in. As the jar and hitch of the stoppage came, the curtained door was violently opened in their faces, and Mrs. Henderson started back with a little scream. Batterman was by her in an instant, and had taken her by the arm. She had her hat and veil on, and was evidently dressing for traveling. When she saw Batterman, she looked at him insolently for a moment, and then she took the pin from her hat and threw it on a table.

"If you know it, I suppose it is all over London, and I may as well stay," she said.

"Suppose you let me speak to you for a few moments," Batterman replied. The man had disappeared.

"I haven't time for that. Do you know what is happening? Lord Lurgan is dying in there." A dry sob that may have been sorrow or nervousness was in her throat. "I was ready to stay with him, to meet anything with him, but there

was no use of my losing him and everything else beside. I thought perhaps people did not know—that I could get back to London, and they never would know. It is pneumonia, and the doctors say it is hopeless. There is one of them in there with a nurse now. He is being taken care of.”

“There is no reason why you should not go back to London,” Batterman said. “Nobody except one or two people who will not talk—and Lurgan’s wife—knows that you are here with him. It would be best that you should go. I shall send for Lurgan’s mother if he is dying, and she would hardly care to come here while you remained.”

Batterman did not care to make his words soft. He might have had sympathy for her—few men haven’t sympathy for a woman who throws away the world for the man she loves, however lawlessly—if he had found her by Lurgan’s side; but this effort to eat her cake and have it too, her selfishness, put her in a class which could only be utterly despicable.

Mrs. Henderson took up her hat and pinned it on her head again.

“I am going, then,” she said, and without another word she went back into her own life, to wait dutifully until her husband came home, and to be the favorite of other seasons, with only a

vague remembrance of an old scandal that might have been. As that sufficed to keep her in the minds of people, it was rather an advantage than otherwise.

Batterman waited until the doctor came out, and asked if Mrs. Henderson's story was true.

"He cannot live forty eight hours. He knows he is dying, but he wants nobody sent for. It isn't pneumonia that is killing him, but a complication of things brought on by his life. Pneumonia is only the herald that has awakened the other enemies."

"He is an only child," Batterman said, "and I am going to send for his mother."

Batterman did not expect Lurgan to know that he was there, but an hour after Lady Lurgan's arrival she came and told him that her son wished to speak to him. It was with a pity which Alice could not feel because she was not there in that atmosphere of approaching death, which makes even a condemned murderer a creature to be tenderly considered for a little while, that Batterman went into the room where Lurgan lay. He was fully conscious, but he was so weak that it was with difficulty that he spoke; and yet in his pale, terrible face was the expression which belonged to his least pleasant moments. Perhaps it was the bravery of his ancestors showing itself in this way.

"I want to thank you for straightening this out as you have," he said, "although I know that it is not exactly on my account that you did it; and Alice will thank you in her own way." He stopped, and but for the fact that every breath might be his last Batterman would have left him. "She will get what she wants. She is a countess, although I don't believe she cares much for that. And the money—what there is of it—goes back to her at my death." His face contracted as he said the last word. He didn't want to die. "You'll find her a cold, hard woman, Batterman. I suppose all your American women are alike. You have spoiled them. They don't know how to forgive a man when the time comes. But you won't need forgiveness, perhaps."

"This is unnecessary," Batterman said quietly.

"Yes, I know, but I have generally done the unnecessary thing. If I hadn't run away with Flo Henderson I shouldn't be here, and she evidently found that unnecessary, because she has gone, they tell me, without a good by. You have a proverb, haven't you. 'Come easy, go easy;' " and he gave a twist to his features which might have been a smile.

Batterman felt sick, it was all so horrible; and the sight of that face, the sound of that

voice, were in his brain, coming back to him for years.

“ I have been all wrong, of course, but I have lived pretty much according to my nature. I should have rubbed along somehow, if——” He stopped again. “ Batterman,” he said, “ the mistake and the badness weren’t all on my side. They oughtn’t to have married Alice to me. I couldn’t understand her, and she couldn’t understand me. She’s a saint, but she didn’t belong in my life. And I’ve a suspicion that she mightn’t have been so stony if——” He stopped again. “ You have my blessing,” he added drowsily.

Batterman called the nurse, and went away, to come back in two hours and hear that Lurgan was dead. He and Alice, after conventionalities of mourning were over, would be as free to marry each other as they had been that October afternoon only a few short years ago. He had hesitated to ask her to do so, that she might have a little more life. Now, they had both had so much that the boy and girl of that time were forever dead, and there were only a strong man and a sober woman who looked first at the dark side of life.

THE END.



UCSB LIBRARY

X-53188

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 621 013 2

